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THE
LAST OF THE VANDALS

Engl. translation of Gellner

BY
FELIX DAHN

AUTHOR OF "ATTILA THE HUN," "A STRUGGLE FOR ROME,"
ETC., ETC.

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THE LAST OF THE VANDALS.

I.

TO CORNELIUS CETHEGUS CÆSARIUS FROM A
FRIEND.

To you, rather than to any other man living, I send what I have here written down. Shall I tell you why?

Frankly, in the first place, because I do not know just where these lines will find you, and it is probable, therefore, that they will be lost in the sending. Perhaps that might be the best thing that could happen, both for those who would be spared the trouble of reading them, and for myself, their author.

If they are destined to go astray, it is at least better that they should be lost somewhere else than at Byzantium. For should they fall here into certain little hands, whose dainty beauty is preserved with exquisite care, those same little

hands might make a graceful motion that would cost me my head or some other object to which habit has led me to attach especial value. If, however, I despatch these truthful observations and comments to the West, they cannot so readily come into the clutches of the dangerous fingers which manage to lay hold of every hidden thing in this great metropolis.

Although I have no means of ascertaining whether you are residing in your house near the Capitol, or whether you are in the service of the queen-regent at Ravenna, I have directed my packet to Rome, for it is towards Rome that my thoughts fly, seeking out Cethegus.

Do you ask, with your old sarcastic smile, why I write down things which are so dangerous?

Well, then, because I must. Induced by fear, I keep praising so many men and so many measures that in my heart I detest, that reproachful conscience compels me, at least in secret, to make an avowal of the truth.

You think, perhaps, that, as a vent to one's indignation, one might record these matters in their true light, and then fling the pages into the sea. But—and this is the second reason why I send them to you—I am not without vanity.

I want the cleverest man of my acquaintance to read and commend what I write, and to know that I am not so silly as to consider worthy of admiration all that I publicly praise. I may also wish to use these notes hereafter, when I set forth the true history of the remarkable events which I have witnessed, and those which I am soon likely to witness. Keep these pages, therefore, if they reach you; they form not so much letters as a sort of chronicle.

I expect no written answer. Perhaps, however, I shall hear your opinion from your own lips. We have not seen each other since our school days at Athens. But it may be that before long I shall seek you out in your native Italy. For I cannot help thinking it is only the prelude to the struggle with your rulers, the Ostrogoths—this war that has been determined upon, this very day, against the Vandals.

There, it is out, the great and fateful secret! It is a strange thing to see written down distinctly before one a fearful decree of fate, pregnant with blood and misery, an impending catastrophe which its victims do not yet dream of. At such times the statesman may justly feel himself akin to the god who forges the thunderbolt destined

to fall upon a thoughtless and light-hearted people.

Feeble, mortal god! Will thy bolt strike or will it rebound and bring ruin upon thyself?

The demi-god Justinian and the full-blooded goddess Theodora have fashioned this lightning. The hero Belisarius is to bear it to Africa. War with the Vandals!

Thus much, Cethegus, you now know, but not yet all—at least not all about the Vandals.

The Vandals are the cousins of your esteemed masters the Ostrogoths. A hundred years ago they migrated—men, women, and children, to the number of fifty thousand—from Spain to Africa. A terrible king, Geiseric, the fitting ally of the Hun Attila, was at their head. He overthrew the Romans in many battles, captured Carthage, and plundered Rome. He was never defeated. His crown became hereditary in his family, the Asdings, who are supposed to have sprung from the old heathen gods of the Germans, the eldest survivor of the male line always succeeding to the throne.

But Geiseric's descendants, while inheriting his sceptre, have not inherited his greatness.

The Catholics in their kingdom—the Vandals

themselves are heretics, Arians—have been persecuted with barbarous cruelty. This policy has been more foolish than unjust. Indeed, it can hardly be termed unjust at all; for the Vandals simply turned against the Catholics, the Romans, the very laws which the Roman emperor, in his dominions, had devised and employed against the Arians. But it certainly was very foolish. The few Arians in our territories can accomplish nothing against us. But in Africa the Catholics are so numerous that they could themselves almost overturn the Vandal kingdom, if they should make the attempt. And to induce them to make it is the object of our proposed expedition.

Will we conquer? We have much in our favor. King Hilderic lived for a long time in Byzantium, and is said to have become privately a convert to the Catholic faith. This descendant of Geiseric has no liking for war; besides, he is a friend to Justinian. Then, too, Hilderic struck a terrible blow at the stability of his kingdom when he transformed its strongest support, the friendship of the Ostrogoths in Italy, into deadliest enmity. The shrewd old Ostrogoth Theodoric, at Ravenna, formed a close alliance with the Vandal King Thrasamund, Hilderic's predecessor

on the throne, giving him his beautiful and talented sister Amalafrida in marriage, and adding to the treasures of her dowry the promontory of Lilybæum in Sicily. The possession of this place, which, as you know, lies directly opposite to Carthage, was a most valuable acquisition for the Vandal kingdom. As an aid against the Moors—and perhaps, too, against us—Theodoric sent also a thousand picked Gothic warriors, each of whom took with him five stout men-at-arms as a following. Scarcely had Hilderic become king when the widow Amalafrida was accused of treason and threatened with death.

Now if this treason was not a thing devised by Justinian and Theodora, I sadly misjudge my worshipful masters. I saw the smile with which they greeted the news from Carthage. It was the triumph of the bird-catcher who has sprung his trap upon the unsuspecting bird.

Amalafrida's Goths succeeded in setting her free, and accompanied her flight when she endeavored to seek protection among the Moors. But on the way they were overtaken by a largely superior force of Vandals under the two nephews of the king. The faithful Goths fought until they fell, man by man, almost the whole six thou-

sand. The queen herself was recaptured and murdered in prison. Since then bitter hatred has existed between the two nations. The Goths took back Lilybæum, and from its lofty headlands cast revengeful glances towards offending Carthage. This is the only important act of regal authority that has marked King Hilderic's reign. Since then he has recognized the fact that it would be better for his people to accept our protection. But he is growing old, and his cousin Gelimer—unfortunately the legitimate heir to his throne—is our most bitter enemy.

It would never do for him to become king at Carthage. He is the shield and hero, aye, the soul of the Vandal power. It was he who finally subdued those wild sons of the desert, the Moors, after they had repeatedly proved themselves an overmatch for the feeble successors of Geiseric. With regard to this Gelimer—it is not possible from the conflicting reports we receive to gauge the man with any accuracy. Can a German really present such contradictory traits in his life and character? What are the men of that race, with all their six or seven foot stature, but boys—giants with the souls of children? What other

aim in life have they except fighting and drinking? But this Gelimer—well, we shall see.

As to the Vandal people themselves, there are in circulation here two diametrically different estimates.

According to the one, they are fearful adversaries in battle, as Geiseric's Vandals unquestionably were.

Other accounts state that in the course of three generations under the hot African sun they have become effeminate and degenerated,—a result which has been helped forward not a little by their association with our own provincials there; for these are, as you doubtless know, the most disreputable and corrupt rabble that ever disgraced the Roman name.

Our Belisarius naturally looks with contempt upon this enemy, as he does upon all others with whom he is acquainted and—unacquainted.

The imperial gods have entrusted to me the secret correspondence which shall secure in advance a successful issue.

Even now I am awaiting important news from many chieftains of the Moors; from the Vandal governor of Sardinia; from your Ostrogoth rulers in Sicily; from the richest and most influential

Senator in Tripolis—yes, difficult as it may be to believe it, from one of the highest functionaries of the heretic church itself.

This last will be a master-stroke. True, he is not a Vandal, but a Roman; but all the same, an Arian priest in alliance with us!

For this, however, I am inclined to concede the credit to our sovereigns. You know how bluntly I refuse to acknowledge their superiority in the internal regulation of our empire; but when it comes to the highest “statesmanship,” that is, to win over traitors in the confidential councils of other monarchs and to outwit in subtlety the craftiest, then I bend my knee in wondering admiration before these two divinities of cunning. If only—

A note from Belisarius summons me to the palace:

“Bad news from Africa. The war is again very doubtful. The apparent traitors there have betrayed, not the Vandals, but Justinian. This comes from such deceitful artifices. Help, advise us!”
BELISARIUS.”

How? I thought that the secret letters from Africa were to come, by the hands of disguised messengers, to me alone, and then through me to the emperor. That was his express command—I read it myself. And now there are still more

secret despatches, of which I learn only by accident, and not until after they have been received.

This is your work, O Demonodora !

II.

THE Carthage of the Vandals was still a proud and splendid city, still the brilliant "Colonia Julia Carthago" which Augustus had built, in accordance with the plan of the great Cæsar, on the spot where stood the ruins of the ancient city destroyed by Scipio.

True, it was not, as it had been a century earlier, after Rome and Byzantium the most populous city of the empire. But in its buildings and its outward appearance generally it had suffered but little; only the walls with which it had been fortified against Geiseric had been broken down in many places by the assaults of the Vandals, and had not been fully restored—a sign either of arrogant security or of neglectful indolence.

The old citadel, the Phœnician Byrsa, now called the Capitol, still looked down upon the blue Mediterranean and the harbor, doubly fortified by towers and iron chains.

In the open squares and in the broad streets of the upper city stirred and lounged a multitude of idle people. They occupied the steps of the Christian churches, most of which had been transformed from heathen temples; they thronged about the amphitheatre and the porticos of the baths, with their garden-like grounds adorned with beds of flowers and groups of palms, kept fresh and green by water conveyed from a distance on the lofty arches supporting an aqueduct. The lower city, situated in the vicinity of the sea, was inhabited chiefly by the poorer class of citizens, many of them laborers about the port. It was filled with warehouses and stores for supplying the wants of ships and sailors, and was traversed by narrow streets, running from south to north, from the upper city to the harbor.

The most extensive open space in the lower city was the Forum of St. Cyprian, where stood a magnificent church, dedicated to this greatest of the saints of Africa.

The church filled the entire southern side of the square. On the northern side a flight of marble steps led down to the harbor, where still rise the imposing ruins of the old sea-gate. Towards the west ran a broad street to the suburb Atlas and the Numidian gate, while on the southeast a tolerably

steep road ascended to the upper city and the Capitol.

On a warm afternoon in June, in the year A.D. 534, a throng of people were streaming into the great square before the church from the direction of the west gate. There were Romans and provincials, Carthaginian citizens of the middle and poorer classes, mechanics and shopkeepers, freedmen and slaves, whom idleness permitted or curiosity impelled to witness a spectacle of more than ordinary interest. There were also Vandals among the number, men, women, and children, who in appearance formed a sharp contrast to the people of the other nationalities by their red or light-colored hair and by the whiteness of their complexion, although this in some cases had been bronzed by the African sun. In dress, however, there was little difference observable between them and the Romans. Among the lower classes there were also some of mixed blood, mostly those whose fathers had been Vandals and their mothers Carthaginians. Here and there, too, might be seen a Moor, who had come from the verge of the desert to dispose of ivory, ostrich-feathers, antelope-horns, and the skins of lions and tigers.

Among the noisy and rejoicing crowd not a

Roman of the better class was to be seen. A Catholic priest, who on his way to a dying man had not been able to avoid this square, slipped timidly into the first side street he reached, fear, displeasure, and abhorrence all portrayed on his pale countenance.

For the clamorous crowd were celebrating a victory of the Vandals.

In front of the returning troops marched a dense mass of the Carthaginian populace, uttering loud shouts, and from time to time halting to look back; others thrust themselves forward, begging and seeking gifts from the Vandal soldiers. They were all mounted, and, for the most part, on remarkably fine horses, obtained by crossing the highly-prized stock which they had brought from Spain with the existing native breed.

The afternoon sunshine came streaming through the wide-open western gate and was dazzlingly reflected from the white sand of the "Numidian Way" and the white houses that lined its course. In such a light the approaching squadrons could not fail to present a brilliant appearance. For rich, rich to excess, was the display of gold and silver on their helmets and shields, on their breastplates, on the broad circlets they wore on

their bare arms, on their scabbards and sword-handles, on the fastenings which bound together spear-point and shaft, and in inlaid work even on the spear-shafts themselves.

In the trappings of the horses, as well as in the dress and decorations of the riders, the most glaring colors were everywhere the most favored. Scarlet, the national color of the Vandals, predominated. It shone in all its brightness from the long, fluttering mantles of the troopers; from the broad pieces of silk, which fell down behind from their helmets upon the neck and shoulders, as a protection against the sun of the desert; from the richly painted, gilded quivers, and from the saddles and bridles of the horses. Among the skins which the beasts of the African solitudes afforded in rich variety, preference was given to those of the antelope, the spotted leopard, and the striped tiger, while above the helmets of the riders nodded and waved the bright red feathers of the flamingo or the white plumage of the ostrich.

The close of the procession was formed by some captured camels, laden with weapons taken in war. Beside these came on foot about a hundred Moorish prisoners, both men and women, their

hands bound behind their backs. They were clad in mantles with brown and white stripes, but their heads and feet were bare. Like the camels, they were driven along by their guards by blows and thrusts with the shafts of their spears.

Upon the steps of the basilica and upon the wall that surrounded the steps leading to the harbor the pageant-loving populace had seized upon every available foot of room, for from these elevated positions they could best look upon the brilliant procession without danger from the spirited horses.

“Who is the young man yonder, the one with the fair complexion, friend Eugenēs?” asked a man in the prime of life, pointing over the parapet behind which he stood. The speaker from his dress and appearance was evidently a sailor, and his question was addressed to a gray-haired man at his side.

“Which one do you mean, friend Hegelochos? Almost all of them have a fair complexion.”

“Is that a fact? Well, it is the first time I have ever been among the Vandals. Our ship came to anchor only a few hours ago. So you will have to point out and explain to me whatever there is to be seen. I mean the one yonder on the white

horse—the one who carries the small red banner with the golden dragon.”

“Oh, that is Gibamund, ‘the handsomest of the Vandals,’ as the women call him. See how he fixes his gaze on the arched windows of the royal palace up there on the Capitol! Among the many faces which look down from yonder palace, there is only one he seeks.”

“But”—and the speaker started in surprise—“who is that at his right—the one on the cream-colored horse? I was actually startled when his eye fell upon me. He looks like the young man, except that he is much older.”

“That is his brother, that is Gelimer. God bless him!”

“Oh, here, then, is the hero of the day? I have often heard of him in Syracuse. He, I suppose, is the conqueror of the Moors?”

“Yes, he has beaten them again, the troublesome rascals, as he has often done before. Do you hear the Carthaginians cheer him? We citizens also have to thank him because he drives yonder robbers back to their desert, away from our villas and fields.”

“He is, I should say, about fifty years old. His hair is quite gray.”

"He is not yet forty."

"Look, Eugenēs! He has sprung from his horse. What is he doing?"

"Did you not see? A child, a Roman boy, who attempted to run across before his horse, fell. Gelimer has picked him up and holds the boy in his arms."

"He is looking whether the child is injured."

"It is not hurt. It smiles at him and tries to grasp the golden chain around his neck."

"He has taken off the chain and placed it in the little one's hands. And now he kisses him—he puts him back into his mother's arms."

"Hark, how the people shout! Now he has sprung again into the saddle."

"He evidently understands how to gain popularity."

"You do him injustice. He follows the dictates of his own heart. He would have acted just the same, had there been no one to observe him. Besides, he does not need to court the favor of the people; he has long possessed it."

"Among the Vandals!"

"Yes, and among the Romans; that is, among us of the middle and poorer classes. The senators, indeed, so far as any of them still live in

Africa, hate all that bears the name of Vandal; and they have good grounds for it too. But Gelimer has a heart that feels for us; he helps us where he can, and often holds in check the nobles of his race, who are almost without exception arrogant, wanton, and terrible in the fury of their rage. Before all others I have reason to thank him, to thank him with my whole heart."

"You? Why?"

"You remember my daughter, Eugenia, whom you saw before we left the house?"

"Certainly. Into what a lovely, graceful maiden the delicate child that you brought with you has grown!"

"I owe to Gelimer her life, her honor. Thrasaric, the giant, the most unruly of all these nobles, seized her as she was walking beside me, here upon the open street, in broad daylight, and with an insolent laugh bore away the screaming girl in his arms. I could not follow as quickly as he ran, when fortunately Gelimer came up, attracted by our cries, and when the savage refused to give up his prey, struck the giant down with a blow of his fist and gave me back my terrified child."

"And the abductor?"

"He got up, shook himself, laughed, and said to

Gelimer: 'You have done right, Asding. And your fist gives a stout blow.' And since then—"

"Well? You hesitate."

"Yes, just think of it: since then the Vandal, who could not win her by force, has become a modest suitor for my daughter's hand! The richest noble among his people wishes to be my son-in-law."

"Well, now, that would not be a bad provision for her."

"Princess Hilda, the noble patroness of my child, who often invites her to the Capitol and richly rewards the little one for her tasteful embroidery—Princess Hilda speaks in his behalf. But I—I hesitate; at least I will not use my authority over my child, and Eugenia—"

"What does the little one say?"

"Well, the barbarian is as handsome as a picture. I almost believe—I fear—he pleases her. But something holds her back. Who is it can read a woman's heart? But see! the leaders of the troops, among them Gelimer, are dismounting in front of the basilica."

"Strange! He is the one who is honored. His name resounds over the whole broad place: and

yet he looks so solemn, one might almost say, so mournful."

"Yes, at present. But you saw the kindly look on his countenance when he comforted the frightened child."

"Of course I saw it. And now—"

"Yes, there is something that weighs upon him. It comes over him suddenly, like a dark cloud. Among the people there are all sorts of rumors. He has a demon in him, say some; his mind is at times unbalanced, is the opinion of others; while our priests hint that he suffers from the torments of conscience on account of secret crimes. But that I will never believe about Gelimer."

"Was he always so?"

"It has been more marked for the last two or three years. Satan—may the holy St. Cyprian protect us!—is said to have appeared to him in the solitude of the desert. Since then he has become more devout than before. Look! His most intimate friend is greeting him at the church."

"The priest yonder? He is an Arian. I know it by the style of his tonsure."

"Aye," replied the Carthaginian, angrily. "Verus is the arch-deacon. Accursed traitor!" And he clinched both his fists.

“Traitor! Why?”

“Apostate at least, if not traitor. He descends from an old Roman senatorial family, which gave many a bishop to the church. His great-uncle was Bishop Laetus, who met a martyr’s death. His father, his mother, his brothers and sisters, in the reign of a former king all died by the most fearful tortures rather than renounce the holy Catholic faith. This one, too,—he was at the time about twenty years old,—was stretched on the rack until he was nearly dead. When he came to his senses again he abjured the true faith, became an Arian, a priest—the wretch!—in order to save his life. And soon—for Satan has endowed him with great gifts—he rose from step to step, became the favorite of the Asdings and the court, and all at once the friend of the noble Gelimer, who for a long time had treated him with coldness and contempt. And they gave him this church, our holiest sanctuary, consecrated to the great St. Cyprian. For the heretics took it from us, as they did almost all our churches in Carthage.”

“But what are they doing there? Gelimer is kneeling down on the topmost step of the church. He has taken off his helmet.”

"He is strewing the dust of the marble ste¹ upon his head."

"What was that he kissed? The priest's hand?"

"No; the box containing the ashes of the great protecting saint. He is very pious and very self-abasing. He shuts himself up for days at a time with the monks who are doing penance, in order to mortify the flesh."

"A peculiar hero for a barbarian race!"

"The hero's blood shows itself fast enough in the heat of battle. There, he is rising. Do you see how his helmet is hacked by recent blows? And one of the black vulture's wings on its crest is actually cut through.—But the strangest thing about this warrior is his interest in manuscripts; he delves deep in mystic lore; he has listened to the philosophers at Athens. He is a theologian and—"

"A performer on the lyre besides, it appears."

"That is a harp, as they term it."

"Listen: he strikes the strings. He is singing; I cannot understand the words."

"They are in the Vandal tongue."

"He has finished. How his followers applaud! They clash their spears on their shields. Now he

is descending the steps again. How? Without going into the church, as the others did?"

"Oh yes, I remember. He is bound by a vow not to cross the threshold of the saints for three days after he has shed blood. Now the horsemen have all mounted again."

"But where are the foot-soldiers?"

"They have none,—or at least very few. They have become not only so proud, but also so lazy and effeminate, that they despise service on foot. Only the very poorest, the very lowest in station, can be induced to undertake it. The mass of their infantry consists of Moorish mercenaries, enlisted for each campaign among the friendly Moorish tribes."

"Yes, yes. In fact I see some Moors over there among the soldiers."

"They are men from the Papuan mountains. Gelimer gained them over. For a long time they had been plundering our borders, when Gelimer fell upon their camp and captured the three daughters of their chief, Antallas. They were sent back without ransom. Then Antallas invited the Asding to his tent to thank him, and there they became bound to each other by the guest-rite, the most sacred bond among the Moors,

Since then they have rendered Gelimer faithful service, even against other Moors. But the procession is now at an end, the ranks are breaking. The leaders are going to the Capitol to make their report to King Hilderic and to deliver over the booty. See, the people are dispersing. Let us go, too. Return with me to my house. We shall find Eugenia has our supper waiting for us. Come along, Hegelochos."

"I follow you, most hospitable of hosts. I shall be a burden upon you for some time, I fear. My business with the grain-merchants cannot be hurried."

"Why are you waiting? At what are you looking back?"

"I'm coming. I wanted to take just one more look at the face of this Gelimer. I can't help thinking of him and his striking countenance, especially after the strange account you have given of him."

"It is just so with most people. He is a riddle, incomprehensible, governed by a familiar spirit, as the Greeks say. But let us go. This way! To the left—down the steps."

III.

HIGH above on the Capitol stood the royal palace of the Asdings. It was not a single structure, but a group of buildings.

Originally laid out as an acropolis, a fortress for the domination of the lower city and for affording an outlook across both harbors to the sea beyond, the place had been but little changed by Geiseric and his successors. The palace was intended to remain a stronghold and to keep the Carthaginians in subjection.

A narrow road led up from the port and terminated at a gate in the wall of the fortress. Through this gate a passage was afforded into a quadrangular enclosure surrounded on all sides by the buildings pertaining to the palace. The north side, towards the sea, was taken up by the residence in which the monarch himself and his family lived. The cellars of this building ran deep down into the rocks of the citadel; they had often served as prisons, especially for political offenders.

To the east of the royal residence, and separated from it only by a narrow intervening space, was the "house of the princes," and opposite this the arsenal. The south side, facing towards the upper city, was closed by the fortress wall with its gate and tower.

On the ground-floor of the house of the princes was a richly-adorned, pillared hall. In its midst, on a table of citron-wood stood a tall, bronze, richly-gilded wine-jar, and beside it were several cups of various patterns. The jar contained a dark red wine, whose strong fragrance pervaded the room.

Not far from the table was a couch, upon which a zebra-skin was spread.

Here sat, locked in a close embrace, "the handsomest of the Vandals" and a young woman of not less striking beauty.

The Vandal had laid aside his helmet, adorned with the silvery feathers of the white heron; his blond locks, of a darker shade than usual with the men of his race, hung down upon his shoulders and mingled with the golden hair of the young woman, who was zealously employed in loosening the heavy breastplate he wore. A moment later

it slipped clattering down beside the helmet and sword-belt on the marble floor of the hall.

Then with her soft hands she brushed back the locks of hair that had thrust themselves forward upon his temples, and feeding, as it were, upon the look of love in his noble countenance, she gazed with rapturous delight into his eyes.

"At last I have you again. I hold you in my arms," she said in a low, thrilling voice.

"Oh, you sweetest of all women!" he cried, as he clasped her to his heart and covered her eyes and cheeks and her trembling lips with passionate kisses. "O Hilda, my happiness, my wife! How I have longed for you—by day, by night, at every moment of my long absence!"

"It has been almost forty days," she sighed.

"Fully forty, and, indeed, it seemed far more."

"Oh, but it was much easier for you! You were with your brother, with your comrades, busily occupied all the time and fighting bravely in the enemy's land. But I—I had to sit here among the women, to sit and weave and wait in inactivity. Oh, that I could go with you! That I could dash forward at your side on a fiery steed, and fight and at last fall with you! After a hero's life a heroic death!"

She sprang up ; her light gray eyes flashed forth a wonderful light ; she tossed back on her neck her waving hair, and uplifted her arms in the fervor of her enthusiasm.

Her husband gently drew her down again beside him.

“ My noble-souled wife, my Hilda,” said he with a smile, “ with prophetic insight your ancestor named you after the glorious leader of the Valkyrias. How I thank him, good old Hildebrand, the great Gothic king’s master of arms ! For with the Valkyr’s name her nature also became yours. And his care and culture nobly developed it.”

Hilda nodded : “ My parents died early and I scarcely knew them. As far back as I can remember I was under the protection and care of the old hero. In the palace at Ravenna he kept me jealously secluded in his own apartments, away from the pious sisters and the monks who educated my youthful companions. I grew up in company with his other ward, the dark-haired, orphaned Teia. It was Teia who taught me to play upon the harp, to cast the spear, and to catch it with the shield. And later when the king, and still more his learned daughter Amalaswintha, insisted that I should take lessons from women and priests, how cross

and out of humor was my great-grandfather, as, scolding all the time, he questioned me in the evening in regard to what the nuns had taught me during the day! When I had recited the Latin sayings and songs, perhaps the 'Deus pater ingenite' or the 'Salve sancta parens' of Sedulius—I remember scarcely anything more of them now except the first lines," laughed she merrily—"then he was wont to shake his massive head, scold a little in his long white beard, and cry: 'Come, Hilda! Into the open air! Out upon the sea! There I will tell you of the old gods and the old heroes of our people.' Then he took me far out from the populous port to the solitude of a small, uninhabited island, over which the screeching sea-gulls circle, and where the wild swan builds her nest in the sea-reeds. There we sat upon the sand, and, while the waves dashed their white foam close up to our feet, he told his story. And how he told it, good old Hildebrand! My eyes fairly hung upon his lips, as, with both elbows propped upon his knees, I gazed up into his face. How his eye, that was as gray as the sea itself, sparkled, how his white hair fluttered in the evening wind! His voice trembled with enthusiasm, he no longer knew where he was, he saw all that he was saying,

or, in moments of still loftier inspiration, chanting. And when he had come to an end, he awoke as from some dream-fought battle, sprang to his feet and laughed contentedly, as he passed his hand over my head: 'There! there! Now I have blown away again from your soul the saints, with their stupid, sickly meekness, as the north wind sweeps through the open church-windows the heavy incense-vapor.' But the saints had not at any time secured a very firm lodgment," she added with a laugh.

"And so you grew up," said her husband, raising his hands in assumed horror, "as Gelimer complains, half a heathen. But," he added in a changed tone, "wholly a heroine, who believes in nothing so sacredly as in the glory of her people."

"And in your glory—and in your love!" she said in a low, impassioned tone and kissed him on the forehead. "Yet it is true," she continued, "that if you Vandals were not of the same great race as my Goths, I do not know whether I should have loved you—yet could I have helped it?—when you came, sent by your brother Gelimer to woo me. As it was, to see you and to love you was the same thing. It is to Gelimer I owe my husband and all my happiness. I will always

remember that, and it shall bind me to him, although," she added, slowly and thoughtfully, "there are many things which tend strongly to repel me from him."

"My brother wished by this marriage to lessen the hostility, to bridge the chasm which, since that bloody deed of Hilderic's, has separated the two kingdoms. He did not succeed. He was able to unite only us, not our people. He is full of heavy cares and gloomy thoughts."

"I often think that he is sick with some vital sickness," said she, musingly, with a shake of her head.

"He? The brawniest hero in our army? Why, he alone—my brother Zaro scarce can do it any more—can bend my outstretched sword-arm."

"Not sick in body—sick in soul, I mean. But hush! there he comes. See how sad, how gloomy! Is that the brow, is that the countenance of a conqueror?"

IV.

IN the colonnade leading from the interior of the building to the arched doorway of the hall was now visible a tall figure, that slowly approached.

The man who had entered was without helmet, breastplate, or sword-belt ; he was dressed in close-fitting, dark gray attire, without any touch of color, and absolutely without adornment.

Several times he paused in his slow advance, absorbed in brooding thought, his hands crossed behind his back, his head bent slightly forward, as if weighed down by the burden of what he was considering. His lofty brow was deeply furrowed, and amid the light brown color of his hair and beard was a plentiful mixture of gray, affording a peculiar contrast to his otherwise still youthful appearance. His eyes were steadily fixed upon the ground, so that their color and expression could not at the moment be determined. He stopped again under the arch of the entrance-door, and a sigh escaped him.

"Hail, Gelimer, victorious hero!" exclaimed the young woman in a cordial, joyous voice. "Receive what I prepared for you when your return was announced for to-day."

So saying, she took from the table a wreath of freshly picked laurel, and held it up as if to place it on his head.

But with a motion of his hand, gentle, but very expressive, he waved her back.

"Not garlands belong upon the head of the sinner," he said, in intense but half-suppressed tones, "but ashes—ashes!"

Sadly and with an aggrieved air Hilda laid the wreath down.

"Sinner?" exclaimed her husband, indignantly. "Well, I suppose we are all sinners—in the eyes of the saints. But you certainly less than any of the rest. Are we on this account never more to rejoice?"

"Let him rejoice who can."

"Oh, brother, you can also. When the spirit of the hero comes upon you, when you are borne along in the wild cavalry-charge, I have heard your exulting shout, and my own heart has leaped in sympathy with your joy, as you dashed forward in advance of us all into the very midst of

the Moorish lancers. I seem still to hear your cry of triumph as you wrested the banner from their standard-bearer, whom you had hurled from his horse by the shock of your onset."

"Yes, yes, that was a glorious moment," exclaimed Gelimer, suddenly lifting his head, while his magnificent hazel eyes flashed with enthusiasm. "Was not that a splendid horse I rode? He sweeps everything before him, as if Victory itself were his rider."

"So it is when he carries Gelimer," called forth a clear voice from one side, and a boy, whose features closely resembled those of Gibamund and Gelimer, sprang over the threshold and hastened towards the latter with outstretched arms.

"O brother, how I love you! And how I envy you! But the next time you go to hunt the Moors you must—you must, I say—take me with you. If you do not, I shall go against your will."

And he threw his arms around his brother's neck.

"Ammata, my brother, the jewel of my heart!" exclaimed Gelimer, as he affectionately stroked the boy's long golden-blond locks. "I have brought you a milk-white pony—one swift as the wind—from the booty. I thought of you at once

when it was led before me. And you, fair sister-in-law, forgive me. I fear I was discourteous just now. My soul was full of gloomy cares, for I came—”

“From the king,” broke in a deep, powerful voice, as a man in full armor entered the room. His great resemblance to the others proclaimed him at once to be the fourth brother.

Features elongated, but thoroughly noble, a sharp, but well-formed nose, a broad forehead, and flashing hazel eyes, sunk almost too deep beneath high-arching brows, were characteristics common to all these royal Asdings of the race of the sun-god Freyr. Gelimer's glance, however, was usually that of a man absorbed in a revery or perplexed by doubt, but if his countenance suddenly lighted with the glow of enthusiasm or anger, then its fiery power became almost startling.

The man who had just entered was somewhat shorter than Gelimer, but much broader in chest and limbs. The powerful muscles of his neck supported a head borne haughtily erect and covered with short, brown, curling hair. The natural flush of health that colored his cheeks was now deepened by violent anger. Although only a year

younger than Gelimer, he seemed like a high-spirited youth in comparison with the man who had aged so much beyond his years.

Every movement bespoke his displeasure and indignation as he strode up to the table and flung upon it his heavy helmet, adorned with the crooked horns of the African buffalo, with such force that the wine spurted out of the cups.

"From Hilderic," repeated he, "the most ungrateful of men. What was the hero's reward for his new victory? Mistrust, fear to awaken jealousy in Byzantium. The coward! Fair sister-in-law, you have more heroism in your little finger than this king of the Vandals in his sword-arm and heart. Give me a cup of Grassiker to wash down my anger."

Hilda sprang nimbly up, poured out the wine and handed him the goblet. "Drink, valiant Zaro! Hail to you and to all heroes, and—"

"To the devil with Hilderic!" shouted the angry Zaro, as he emptied the deep goblet at one draught.

"Be still, brother! What blasphemy!" said Gelimer, reproachfully, as his countenance clouded.

"Well, for all I care, to heaven with him, then!

He is better fitted for it than for the sea-king Geiseric's throne."

"You could give him no higher praise."

"I did not mean it so. As I stood by when he gave you that ungracious answer, I could have— But the time for scolding has passed; now we must act. For good reasons I remained this time at home, hard as it was to see you set out alone to victory. But I have kept a sharp watch on this fox in purple, and I have found out his crafty tricks. Send away this love-sick pair,—I suppose they have a thousand things to say to each other; for, you know, they have been married only a year. Send away Ammata too, and hear my report, my accusation, not only against the king, but against others."

Gibamund placed his arm tenderly around the slender waist of his wife, while the young Ammata ran before them out of the hall.

V.

GELIMER let himself sink down upon the couch, while Zaro, coming straight before him and leaning upon the handle of his long sword, spoke:

"Soon after you departed to the war, Pudentius came from Tripolis to Carthage."

"So soon again?"

"Yes; he is no stranger nowadays at the palace. For hours at a time he confers in private with the king; or with Euages and Hoamer, the king's arrogant nephews and our worthy cousins. The latter, boastful fool, cannot keep silent after drinking. He has babbled in his cups."

"Surely not to you?"

"No; but to the ruddy-faced Thrasaric."

"The roisterer!"

"I say nothing in praise of his manners," laughed Zaro. "Although he has grown much tamer since he became a modest suitor for the hand of the pretty Eugenia. However he is no liar. And he would give his life for the Vandal people, especially for you, whom he calls his preceptor. You began his education, I believe, by knocking him down. In the Grove of Venus—"

"Of the Holy Virgin, you mean to say," interrupted Gelimer, rebukingly.

"Well, if it suits you better. But she will derive little honor from the name as long as the place preserves its old customs. But to my story. At a feast in the shell-grotto of the Grove, Thrasaric praised you, and expressed the opinion that

you will revive the military glory of the Vandals when you become king. Then Hoamer cried out angrily: 'Never! never will that happen! Byzantium has forbidden it. Gelimer is an enemy to the emperor. If my uncle dies, I shall be the king. Or else the emperor will appoint Pudentius as regent. It is so determined upon between us.'"

"He was simply talking in his drunkenness."

"There is truth in wine, the Romans say. Then Pudentius came to the grotto. 'Ha!' the drunken man cried out to him, 'that last letter of yours from the emperor was worth money. Just wait till I am king, and I will reward you for it: you shall be the emperor's exarch in Tripolis.' Pudentius was terribly frightened, and signalled to him to be silent, but he continued: 'No, no; that shall be your well-deserved reward.' All this was related to me by Thrasaric, who came rushing from the feast in furious anger. But wait; there is still more. This Pudentius—do you consider him our friend?"

"Oh no," said Gelimer with a sigh. "His parents, his grandparents, were cruelly put to death by our kings for remaining true to their faith. How could the son, the grandson, love us?"

Here Zaro stepped close to his brother's side, placed his heavy hand on his shoulder, and said

slowly: "And Verus? Ought he to love us? Have you forgotten how his whole family—"

An expression of the deepest grief came over Gelimer's face, as he shook his head. "I—forget that? I?"

He shuddered and closed his eyes. But in a moment, shaking off by a powerful effort his sombre thoughts, he said impatiently: "Still your old deep-rooted delusion! Still this mistrust of the most faithful of all those who love me!"

"Oh, brother! But I do not reproach you for it. Your mind, in other respects so clear, is blind in regard to this priest. It is as if some miracle had been worked."

"A miracle has been worked," interrupted Gelimer, deeply moved, and with a pious glance towards heaven.

"What then do you say to this: that Pudentius, whom you also distrust, has been admitted secretly into the city at night—and by whom? By Verus, your bosom-friend!"

"That is not true."

"I saw it. I will swear to it to the priest's face. Would he were here now!"

"He is not far away. He was the first of you all to greet me on my entrance—he was most anxious, he said, to see me; he must confer with me

at once. I requested him to come here, where he would find me as soon as I should be dismissed by the king. And see! There he comes along the colonnade."

VI.

THE tall, lank priest who with slow step now entered the hall was a man a few years older than Gelimer. The garb he wore was of a dark-brown color and fell in folds, mantle-like, from his broad shoulders. His figure denoted sinewy strength, and his striking face, whose features were too sharply cut to be handsome, possessed an individuality which, if once noticed, could not readily be forgotten. His eyes were dark and penetrating, the brows above them full, black, and arching; but the power of these eyes was seldom revealed, for their glance was directed habitually towards the ground. An aquiline nose, thin, firmly-closed lips, deeply-sunken cheeks, a sallow complexion, with the color of dull yellow marble, all combined to render this expressive countenance one of no ordinary character. His lips, chin, and cheeks were smoothly shaven. His hair was black, but was

much more abundantly sprinkled with gray than his age seemed to require.

Every movement that he made was deliberate and thoroughly controlled, revealing clearly the years of patiently practised self-restraint which had enabled this impenetrable man to obtain the mastery over himself and others.

His voice was low, with a timbre of deep weariness or melancholy, although there were times when the listener was tempted to suspect that its real quality was carefully disguised. So, too, in rare moments, when the downcast eyes lifted, their depths revealed, not the humility and peace which the priestly garb and vocation indicated, but a fiery fervor of intense passion. As a rule, however, nothing that was passing in the secret thoughts of the man caused any change in his outward expression, except that, occasionally, the sharply-cut lips, however firmly they might be pressed together, betrayed by an involuntary twitching that this stiff, corpse-like countenance was not the mask of a dead soul.

Gelimer sprang up and hastened towards the entrance as soon as he perceived the priest. The latter stood motionless, his arms hanging limp at his sides, while the Vandal pressed him affectionately to his breast.

“Verus, my Verus!” he exclaimed. “My guardian-spirit! And it is you—you!—upon whom they seek to cast suspicion? Assuredly, brother, the stars will sooner fall from God’s fixed order in the heavens than this man will swerve from his fidelity.”

So saying, he kissed the cheek of the priest, who made no movement to return either the embrace or the greeting. Angrily Zaro observed the two.

“He has more warmth of feeling, more love,” he muttered, “for this Roman, this foreigner, than for—Speak, priest; can you deny that last Sunday—it was past midnight—Pudentius—Ah, your lip is twitching now!—Pudentius of Tripolis was secretly let in by you at the postern of the east gate, and conducted to your house beside the church? Speak! What say you?”

Gelimer had now stepped aside. Slightly smiling he shook his head, and his eyes rested, full of trust, upon the countenance of his friend.

Verus was silent.

“Speak,” reiterated Zaro. “Deny it, if you dare. You little supposed that I was observing you from the tower above, after I had dismissed the night-watch. For a long time I have mistrusted the warden of the gate, who was formerly a slave of Pudentius; it was you who purchased and liber-

ated him. Do you see, brother? He is silent. I will arrest him at once. We will search his house, his secret cabinets, the altars and sarcophagi in his church, aye, his very clothes, for the treacherous correspondence we shall surely find."

Here the priest's dark eyes flashed a startled look upon the speaker, then they cast a quick, furtive glance towards Gelimer and again fixed themselves tranquilly upon the ground.

"Do you still deny it?"

"No." The word was barely audible as it came from his lips, which seemed scarcely to open as they gave it utterance.

"Do you hear that, brother?"

Gelimer moved quickly a step nearer to Verus.

"It was on this account," said the priest, calmly, "that I asked for an immediate interview, for the purpose of disclosing this very thing."

"Now I call that presence of mind!" said Zaro, with a loud laugh. "But how will you prove what you assert?"

"I have brought the proof with me," continued Verus, still turned towards Gelimer and paying no attention to Zaro's interruption, "that Pudentius is a traitor. Here is the evidence."

He slowly opened his mantle, felt in the folds

of the tunic that covered his breast, and, after some search, drew forth a small, rumpled piece of papyrus. He handed it to Gelimer, who hastily unfolded it and read:

"In spite of your warning the matter is settled. Belisarius is perhaps already on the way. Give this to the king."

Both Vandals started in sudden affright.

"This letter?" Gelimer asked.

"Was written by Pudentius."

"To whom?"

"To me."

"Do you hear, brother?" cried Zaro. "He has betrayed—"

"The traitors," said Verus, finishing the sentence. "Yes, Gelimer, I have acted, while you were brooding in doubt and despair, and while this valiant dullard slept or—blustered. You remember that I warned you long ago that the king and his nephews were in negotiation with Byzantium?"

"Did he do that, really, brother?" asked Zaro, with surprise.

"Long ago. And repeatedly."

The look of astonishment on Zaro's face was mingled with incredulity. But with a toss of his

head he said: "Forgive me, then, priest, if I—if I really did you injustice."

"Pudentius," continued Verus, without replying to Zaro, "was, as I conjectured, the intermediary. I gained his confidence."

"That is, you deceived him—as perhaps you are now deceiving us," suggested Zaro.

"Be still, brother," commanded Gelimer, authoritatively.

"It was not difficult to convince him. By your kings my family, like his own—" He did not finish the sentence, but began again after a second's pause: "I complained of what I had suffered; I found fault with your cruelty."

"And with justice. Alas for us, with justice!" lamented Gelimer, striking his forehead with his clinched fist.

"I said my friendship for you is not so strong as my avenging hate on account of—of those whom I have lost. Then he disclosed his secret plans. I was startled. For truly, if God had not by a miracle blinded his suspicions, the kingdom of the Vandals would have been irreparably lost. I warned him—in order to gain time until you should return, I warned him of the terrible revenge that you would take upon all the Romans,

when the uprising should be suppressed. He hesitated, and finally promised to weigh the matter carefully again and to negotiate still further with the king. This note, brought to me to-day in the basilica by an unknown person, contains his decision. Act quickly. Otherwise it may be too late."

Incapable of speech, Gelimer gazed straight before him. Zaro's hand sought his sword. With an impetuous movement he turned to leave the room.

"Whither now?" said the priest very softly, as he grasped Zaro's arm. So firm, so powerful was the grasp that the Vandal could not shake it off.

"Whither? To the king. To cut down the traitor and his allies. Then to call together the army and—'Long live King Gelimer!'"

"Madman!" cried Gelimer in affright, as if detected in his most secret wishes, "remain here. Will you heap upon the sins which already burden the Vandal people, and especially our house, the added crime of the dethronement and murder of the king, our kinsman? Where is the proof of Hilderic's guilt? Was not my long-cherished suspicion merely the fruit—or the pretext—of my own impatient desire for the crown? Pudentius

may be lying, or at least exaggerating. Where is the proof that treason is intended?"

"Will you wait until it has succeeded?" asked the indignant Zaro.

"No; but I will not punish it until the proof is clear."

"It is thus a Christian speaks," said the priest. "But the evidence must be quickly obtained; we must have it to-day. I have ground for believing that Pudentius is still concealed in the city."

"We must have him!" cried Zaro. "Where is he? With the king?"

"They do not plot so openly. He visits the palace secretly at night. But I know his hiding-place; it is in the Grove of the Holy Virgin, at the warm baths."

"Send me, brother—at once!"

"Go, then," nodded Gelimer.

"But do not slay him," the priest called after the departing Zaro.

"No; by all the saints, we must have him alive!" exclaimed Zaro, as he disappeared through the doorway.

"Oh, Verus," cried Gelimer, deeply moved, "my most faithful friend! Am I to be permitted to thank you for the saving of my people, as well as

for the life you once rescued from a fearful death?" And he sought to take the hand of the priest.

But the latter drew it back.

"It is God whom you have to thank for your own, for your people's fate, not me. I am but the involuntary instrument of his will, since I have assumed this priestly garb. But listen: only to you dare I entrust the full details—your hot-headed brother, in his blind fury, would ruin everything. Your life is threatened. That, I know, does not alarm the hero; but you must be preserved now for your people's sake. Fall, if you must, in the van of your army, by the sword of Belisarius, but you shall not die a miserable death by assassination."

"Assassination? Who would attempt—"

"The king. There is no room for doubt. Pudentius confessed it. His nephews have overcome his scruples. They know that as long as you live their plans miscarry. They will never permit you to become king of the Vandals."

Here a quick, stolen glance flashed from the dark eyes, but they sank again at once to the ground.

"That remains to be seen!" exclaimed Gelimer, hotly. "I *will* be king, and woe—" He broke off

abruptly and his breath came in quick gasps. After a pause he asked humbly and with a faltering voice: "Is this desire a sin, my brother?"

The priest answered quietly: "You have a right to the crown. Should you die, then Hoamer, as the eldest of the male line after yourself, would succeed Hilderic, in accordance with Geiseric's law of succession. Consequently they have persuaded the king to invite you—you alone—on the day of your return to a secret conference in the palace, and there to murder you."

"Impossible, my friend. I have already been before the king. He received me ungraciously, but," he said with a smile, "you see that I still live."

"When in the king's presence you were accompanied by the captains of your army. But take heed, if he should summon you again to-day—and alone."

"That would, indeed, be suspicious. We finished all that required discussion."

At this very moment steps were heard in the passage outside. A negro slave entered and handed Gelimer a letter. "From the king," he said, and withdrew.

The Vandal hastily tore open the fastening of

the wax tablets, glanced over the contents, and turned pale.

"You see—"

"No! no! I will not believe it. It may be a mere coincidence. Hilderic is weak, he hates me—but he is not an assassin."

"So much the better, if Pudentius was lying. But it is a friend's duty to warn you. Do not go."

"I must. Shall I be moved by fear? Does my Verus so misjudge me?"

"Then go not alone. Take Zaro with you—or Gibamund."

"Impossible! Contrary to the king's command? And only unarmed is it permitted to enter the royal presence, when summoned to a secret council."

"At least wear—under your clothing—the coat-of-mail which will protect you against a dagger-thrust. And your short sword—can you not conceal it in your sleeve or girdle?"

"My over-anxious friend!" said Gelimer, smiling. "Solely out of regard for you, I will put on the concealed coat of mail."

"That is not enough. However, on reflection, there will be some way to help you in case of need. Yes, that will suffice,"

“What is it you purpose doing?”

“Hush! I will pray that what is in my thoughts may find fulfilment. And you, too, my brother, pray. For you, and all of us, stand face to face with perils, whose outcome God only——” He stopped suddenly, raised both his hands to his head, and with a hoarse cry fell over upon the couch.

“Oh, Verus!” cried Gelimer. “He has swooned.” And he plunged his hand into the water of the mixing-jug and sprinkled the face of the unconscious man. Slowly the priest opened his eyes and with an effort rose from the couch.

“No matter! It has passed. The anxiety of this hour was perhaps—too great. I am going—no, I do not need support—to the basilica—to pray. Send Zaro thither, as soon as he returns—send him before you go to the king. Do you hear? And may the God of heaven grant my fervent wish!”

VII.

TO CETHEGUS FROM A FRIEND.

THE war against the Vandals has been given up. And from what deplorable reasons!

You know that I consider it much wiser that our sovereign should give attention to the internal affairs of our own empire than to the barbarians. For as long as this unendurable taxation and abuse of office continues in the Romaic realm, so long will every new conquest, every increase in the number of our subjects, only augment the list of the unfortunate.

If, however, we desire to win back the African provinces, we surely ought not to abandon so glorious an enterprise—out of pure cowardice.

There the abominable word stands, plainly written!—and, unfortunately, it speaks the truth.

The cowardice of whom? Not of the Empress Theodora. Cowardice is not a weakness of this dainty, delicate woman. Two years ago when the fearful sedition of the green and the blue swept

resistlessly from the circus over the entire city, when Justinian despaired and was about to flee, it was Theodora's courage that kept him in the palace, and the faithfulness of Belisarius that saved him. Nor does the reproach this time lie against the emperor. It is the army, and especially the fleet, that must bear the stigma.

It is true Justinian's zeal has perceptibly cooled since the clever plan miscarried to destroy Geiseric's kingdom almost without war, purely through "artifice," or treachery, as ordinary people would be apt to term it. King Hilderic, at a time agreed upon, was to send his entire army to the south for a great campaign against the Moors ; then our fleet was to sail into the undefended harbor of Carthage, land the army, occupy the port, and proclaim Hilderic, Hoamer, and a senator of Tripolis the three governors for Justinian in the recovered province of Africa. But we crafty schemers were outwitted by one still more crafty. Our friend from Tripolis writes that he has been deceived in that Arian priest whom he supposed he had won over; that the priest in the beginning seemed favorably disposed, but afterwards began to waver and to discourage the enterprise, if, indeed, he did not betray the whole matter to the Vandals. The

only course left was to make an open attack. This naturally commended itself to Belisarius, but not to the emperor. He hesitated.

Meanwhile—God only knows how!—the news of the coming Vandal war spread through the court and the city, among the army and the fleet, and—oh, shame and disgrace!—anxiety and fear seized, not only the soldiers and sailors, but even the commanders and the highest dignitaries of the state. For all thought of the last great campaign against these dreaded enemies, undertaken two generations ago, in the time of the Emperor Leo, with all the might of our realm. At the same time the Emperor of the West attacked the Vandals in Sardinia and Tripolis. A hundred and thirty thousand pounds of gold were spent. Basilikos, the emperor's brother-in-law, led a fleet of a thousand ships and an army of a hundred thousand men to the shores of Carthage. In one night all was lost. At the same hour Geiseric fell with his fire-ships upon our crowded triremes off the promontory of Mercury, and his fierce horsemen stormed the Roman camp on the shore. In fire and blood fleet and army went to a common ruin. And now the prætorian prefect and the imperial treasurer lament :

“It will happen just as before. The last solidi

of the almost empty chests will be sunk in the sea."

And the generals of the army—except Belisarius and Narses—what heroes! Each one fears that the emperor will select him. And how can he, granting that he overcomes his terror of the sea, effect a landing on a hostile coast in the face of the dreaded Germans? The soldiers, moreover, who have just returned from the Persian war, have scarcely yet tasted the pleasures of idleness. They throng mutinously all the streets, complaining that, having just come back from the most distant east, they are now to be sent to the remotest west, to the Pillars of Hercules, to fight against Moors and Vandals. They have had no experience in naval warfare, they were not enrolled for it and are not obligated to undertake it. At the same time the prætorian prefect has represented to the emperor that to march by land from Egypt to Carthage would require one hundred and fifty days, while the invincible fleet of the Vandals would effectually block the passage by sea. "Do not stir up," he said warningly, "this African wasps' nest. If you do, their pirate ships will plunder our coasts and islands again as they did in the days of Geiseric." The prefect's advice prevailed, and the emperor has abandoned the

undertaking. You may fancy how our angry hero Belisarius grumbles and scolds.

Theodora, too, is angry, but she says nothing. She desired this war most eagerly. I am certainly not her favorite ; I am far too independent, too much the thinker of my own thoughts—and my conscience reproaches me often enough on account of my lack of sincerity. Now *she* has the best possible—that is to say, the best disciplined—conscience. It never bites any more ; its teeth, I suppose, have long ago been worn off. But even I have repeatedly received the dainty little papyrus-rolls, with the flaming scorpion on the seal, which are accustomed to convey her secret commands, and in these notes I have been urgently advised to manifest a zeal for war, if I do not wish entirely to lose her good-will.

VIII.

SINCE I wrote the above, a few days ago, important news has reached us from Africa.

Mighty changes have occurred there, changes which may compel the wavering emperor to undertake the war. That which our statesmanship

was most zealously endeavoring to prevent for the future has, in spite of our efforts, perhaps indeed because of them, already taken place: Gelimer is king of the Vandals.

The archdeacon Verus—for now we can call things by their right names—was really plotting against us, not for us. He betrayed everything to Gelimer. Pudentius of Tripolis, who was secretly staying in Carthage, was to be seized. Verus disclosed his place of concealment. Although in this connection it is somewhat remarkable that a few minutes previously Pudentius made his escape from Carthage, mounted on the priest's best horse.

On the same day, in the royal palace, a mysterious affair occurred, of which only the result is clear, for Gelimer is king of the Vandals. What actually took place and the reasons for it are variously stated. Some say that Gelimer attempted to murder the king, others that the king sought to take Gelimer's life. Still others whisper—so writes Pudentius—about a secret warning given to the king. Some unknown person had revealed to him by letter that Gelimer would attempt to poniard him at their next private interview. In order to bring the crime home to the would-be assassin, the king was advised

to summon him to such an interview. The murderer would either, on account of a guilty conscience, refuse to come, or, in defiance of the stringent regulations of the court, would be provided with defensive armor and a concealed weapon. Hilderic, therefore, should equip himself with a coat-of-mail and a dagger, and should have assistance within call. This advice the king followed.

It is certain that he invited Gelimer that evening to a conference in his sleeping-room, on the ground-floor of the palace. Gelimer came. The king embraced him, discovered the coat-of-mail under his clothing, and called for help. From a side chamber rushed the king's nephews, Hoamer and Euages, with drawn swords, to slay the murderer. But at the same time there sprang through the windows, from the garden, two of Gelimer's brothers, whom Verus had concealed among the bushes. The king and Euages were disarmed and made prisoners. Hoamer escaped and summoned the Vandals whom he met to arms to free their king, who had been murderously assailed by Gelimer. The barbarians hesitated, for Hilderic was but little loved, while Gelimer was held in high honor and considered incapable of such a crime. And now Gelimer came up, gave the lie to his ac-

cuser, charged Hilderic and his nephews with attempted murder, and to decide, the matter, challenged Hoamer to mortal combat before all the people, and struck him dead at the first blow. The Vandals shouted their approval, pronounced forthwith in a tumultuous assemblage the deposition of Hilderic, and hailed Gelimer, the lawful successor, as king. Scarcely could the new monarch's intercession save the lives of the two captives.

With regard to Verus, it is said that he has been raised to the office of chancellor, and appointed Gelimer's chief adviser. What think you of that? We who have been betrayed know through what services the priest has deserved such a reward—at our cost.

But my conjecture is that this change of the crown will certainly bring with it war. For Justinian is now bound in honor to rescue or to avenge his dethroned and imprisoned friend. I have already composed a masterly letter to this "tyrant" Gelimer, the ending of which reads: "Contrary to right and your duty you hold your cousin, the lawful king of the Vandals, in chains, and, a usurper, you deprive him of his crown. Unless you replace him on the throne, we shall take the field against you. And in so doing"—this sen-

tence was dictated to me word for word by the emperor—"in so doing we shall not break the perpetual peace formerly concluded with Geiseric, for we shall not fight against Geiseric's legitimate successor, but rather to avenge him." You notice the juridical subtlety. The emperor prides himself more upon this sentence than Belisarius upon his great victory over the Persians at Dara.

If this Gelimer should really do what we demand; we avengers of the right would find ourselves in an abominable entanglement. For we want this war. We desired to acquire Africa long before this crime took place, which we are setting out to avenge—provided, of course, from motives of economy and prudence, we do not decide to remain quietly at home.

* * * * *

Now we have the answer of the Vandal. For a barbarian and a tyrant a right kingly one!

"King Gelimer to King Justinian" (notice with what insolence he employs the same word, "*basileus*," both for emperor and for king):

"I have not assumed the sceptre by force, nor have I committed a crime against my kinsman. But the people of the Vandals have deposed Hilderic because he plotted iniquitously against the line of the Asdings, against his lawful suc-

cessors, and against the kingdom itself. The law of succession places me, as the oldest of the Asdings after Hilderic, upon the vacant throne. That monarch, O Justinian, acts wisely who governs well his own state and does not interfere in the affairs of others. If you break the sworn treaty and attack us, we will manfully defend ourselves and invoke the aid of a righteous God, who punishes perjury and all injustice."

Good! You please me, King Gelimer. It delights me to have some one tell our imperial jurist that he ought not to blow a fire which does not burn him, a saying which it seems to me is the epitome of all statesmanship.

The letter of the barbarian has hotly incensed Justinian, which is a further proof that the barbarian is right. But it appears that we are going to put this answer as quietly in our pockets as we thrust back into its scabbard the sword we were formerly about to draw. The emperor inveighs openly against the tyrant, but the army asserts still more openly that it will not fight. And the empress—says nothing.

IX.

MEANWHILE King Gelimer with all his might prepared for the impending struggle. He found much, altogether too much, that demanded immediate attention.

The king, while reserving to himself the general direction of affairs and personally taking part wherever it seemed to be necessary, had entrusted to Zaro the restoration of the fleet, to Gibamund that of the army.

On the evening of a sultry August day he received their detailed reports. The three brothers had met in the great hall of state of the royal palace, in which Gelimer now resided. The open windows afforded a magnificent view over the harbor out upon the sea, and through them came the refreshing breath of the north wind.

This part of the old citadel had been remodelled by the Vandal kings, altered according to the requirements of life at the court of a German monarch. The round Grecian columns were here replaced, in imitation of the architecture of the Germanic wooden halls, by great quadrangular pillars of brown and red marble, which Africa furnished in rich variety. The roof was wain-

scoted with woodwork painted or stained in different colors. Everywhere on stone and wood, in addition to the rune A crossed by an arrow, the armorial badge of the Asdings, not only other runes, but also short sayings were carved on the mouldings in the Gothic letters of Ulfilas. Rich curtains of purple silk swayed in the breeze at the open arched windows; the walls were adorned with slabs of polished marble, arranged in a varied alternation of, for the most part, glaring colors, a combination especially pleasing to barbaric taste; the floor was composed of artistic mosaics, but roughly laid and ill-fitting, for Geiseric had simply caused to be joined together, without much selection, the patterns richest in color which, together with statues and reliefs, he had brought here in whole shiploads from the palaces of plundered Rome.

On the side facing the sea rose, on five broad steps, the throne of Geiseric. These steps were intended to receive the personal followers of the king, the nobles and guards, the leaders of a thousand and the captains of a hundred, arranged according to their rank and the favor of their sovereign. When they all, in their rich, fantastic, half-Roman, half-German dress and armor, were ranged here close about their king, while above

them waved the Vandal banners of scarlet silk, and when on the lofty throne, from whose tent-like canopy a golden dragon hung, swinging from a cord,—when on this throne, at the base of which, as symbols of tribute, Moorish princes had heaped up piles of lion and of tiger skins, the mighty sea-king raised the seven-lashed scourge, presented to him by his friend Attila, and with angry threats swung it around his massive head, the scene was one that the beholder could not soon forget, and many an ambassador of the emperors had quietly suppressed, on such occasions, the haughty message he had previously prepared.

But the richest decoration of this imposing hall was formed by the almost innumerable weapons of every sort and nation which covered the pillars and walls, while shields and breastplates were spread out horizontally across the entire ceiling. These weapons were for the most part German, Roman, and Moorish, but specimens were not wanting from all the islands and coasts which the predatory vessels of the sea-king had been able to visit.

A peculiar dazzling light streamed from all this bronze, silver, and gold, as from the northwest the oblique rays of the setting sun found their way into the hall.

A broad table of white marble was covered with parchments and rolls of papyrus, which contained lists of the thousands and the hundreds, designs for ships, maps of the Vandal kingdom, and charts of the bays and inlets from Cadiz to the Tyrrhenian Sea.

"In the few weeks during which I have been absent in the West for the purpose of enlisting the Vandal strength in that quarter, you have accomplished more than it seems possible, Zaro," said the king, laying down a tablet upon which he had written some figures. "It is true we are far from reaching the number and strength of the ships which formerly carried the terror of the Vandals to all coasts. But for the defence of our own shores, and for repelling a landing, these hundred and fifty vessels will suffice, if on the fleet and on the shore, as a support, we have a strong body of infantry."

"Be not so cast down, Gibamund," exclaimed Zaro. "Our brother knows it is not your fault that the army is not—does not—"

"Ah," cried Gibamund, angrily, "it is no use! No matter how much I exert myself, they are not willing. They would like to drink and bathe and feast and ride, watch the games in the circus, and in that accursed Grove of Venus indulge in every

sort of licentiousness that tends to destroy their manhood."

"But," said the king, "yesterday an end was put to this abomination."

"You can do much, Gelimer," said Zaro with a shake of the head. "You have accomplished what seems incredible since you have worn this heavy crown ; but to purify the Grove of Venus—"

"Not to purify, to close it," interrupted the king, sternly. "Since yesterday it has been closed."

"I must again make complaint against many, especially the nobles," resumed Gibamund. "They refuse to fight on foot or to drill with the foot-soldiers. You know how deficient we are in infantry. They appeal to the privileges which our weak kings have conferred upon them. They say they are not obligated to do service on foot ; that Hilderic permitted every Vandal to purchase immunity who substituted for himself two enrolled Moorish or other mercenaries."

"I have revoked these privileges."

"Yes, we know that. And a fierce sedition raged, blood flowed on this account through the streets of Carthage while you were absent," said Zaro, angrily.

"But the worst of it is, they cannot any more

fight on foot, these effeminate nobles and wealthier citizens. They cannot, they say,—and unfortunately it is true!—any longer bear the heavy helmets, coats-of-mail, shields and spears, or hurl the mighty javelins which I had brought from Geiseric's armories."

"They are under obligations to arm themselves," interposed Zaro. "Why, then—"

"Because most of them have sold the old, victorious arms, or bartered them for finery or wine or dainty food or female slaves. Or else they have exchanged them for weapons which serve merely as ornaments or toys. With such rubbish I will not permit any one to enter the ranks. And before they could arm themselves satisfactorily, the victory and our kingdom might easily be lost. But it is true they cannot handle Geiseric's weapons. They grow faint after a short time, and curse us, because we now, in the very hottest months of the year—"

"Shall we inform the enemy that the Vandals fight only in winter?" laughed Zaro.

"In order to fill up the gaps in our infantry I have already enlisted many thousands of Moorish mercenaries," said the king, sorrowfully. "Without doubt these sons of the desert, quick-moving and unstable as the sands of their home, are a poor

substitute for the steady firmness of German strength. Still we must do the best we can, and I have gained over twenty chiefs with about ten thousand men."

"Is Cabaon among them—the old patriarch whose years no man can tell?"

"No; he withholds his answer."

"That is unfortunate. He is the most powerful of all. And his supposed gift of prophecy exerts an influence far beyond the people of his own tribe," said Zaro.

"Well, we shall have better helpers than the Moorish robbers," observed Gibamund, consolingly: "the valiant Visigoths in Southern Spain."

"Have you received an answer from their king?"

"Yes and no. King Theudis is a wise and prudent man. I did not leave the matter to Verus, but wrote to him myself. I impressed upon him urgently that Byzantium is threatening not us Vandals alone, and with what ease the imperial troops could cross the narrow sea from Ceuta, if they should subdue us. Then I proposed a mutual alliance. His answer was evasive: he must first convince himself what we for our part can do in war."

"How will he manage that?" asked Zaro.

"Will he hold off until the war has run its course?"

Whether we are victorious or annihilated, we shall not then need his aid."

"I wrote again, more urgently. His reply must soon come to hand."

And the Ostrogoths?" demanded Gibamund, eagerly. "What answer do they give?"

"None."

"That is bad," said Gibamund.

"I wrote to the queen regent. I referred to the fact that I was innocent of all participation in Hilderic's atrocious crime. I warned her that Justinian threatens her realm not less than ours, and reminded her of the near relationship of our peoples—"

"You surely did not descend to entreaties?" asked Zaro, indignantly.

"By no means. I asked for nothing, but demanded only, and with good right, that the Ostrogoths should not support our enemies. As yet there is no response. But worse by far than the lack of allies is the foolish and immeasurable underrating of our opponents on the part of our own people," added the king.

"That is true. They say: Why need we trouble ourselves with preparations and drill? The cowardly Greeks will not dare to attack us. If they do come, then the descendants of Geiseric will des-

troy the descendants of Basilikos, just as Geiseric crushed Basilikos."

"But we are no longer the Vandals of Geiseric's time," lamented Gelimer. "Geiseric brought with him an army of heroes, trained by twenty years of warfare with other Germans and with the Romans among the mountains of Spain, simple in their habits and strict in their morals. He closed the Roman pleasure-houses in Carthage; he forced all dissolute women either to marry or to enter a convent—"

"How that suited their husbands and the nuns who were forced to associate with them is not stated," laughed Zaro.

"And now! Our young men to-day are as corrupt as the most licentious Romans. To the cruelty of their fathers"—here the king sighed deeply—"has succeeded the sensuality, the gluttony, the drunkenness, the utter and wanton indolence of the sons. How can such a people continue to exist? It certainly must perish."

"But we Asdings," said Gibamund with flashing eyes, drawing himself up to his full height, while a glow of pride suffused his handsome face, "we are unspotted by such disgrace."

"Pray what have you and we been guilty of," asked Zaro, "that we should perish before our time?"

Again the king sighed heavily, his brow clouded, and he cast down his eyes. "We? Do we not bear the curse, the— But no! nothing of that; nothing, at least, to you. It is the last straw of my hope that I, the king, at least wear the crown free from guilt. Woe to me if my conscience were not clear in this respect!—Ha! whose cold hand is this? You, Verus? You frightened me."

"He creeps in as stealthily as a snake!" mumbled Zaro in his beard.

The priest, who, even as chancellor, continued to wear his priestly robes, had entered unperceived by all. None of the brothers had any means of knowing how long he had been present. His eye was now fixed steadily upon Gelimer. With a quiet movement he drew back the hand which he had laid upon the king's bare arm.

"Yes, my sovereign, keep ever active this anxiety of conscience. Guard well your soul from guilt. I know your nature—it would crush you with despair."

"You ought not thus," spoke Zaro, angrily, "to fill my brother's mind with gloomy thoughts."

"Guilt and Gelimer!" exclaimed Gibamund, clasping his arm around his brother's neck.

"He is altogether too conscientious, too much addicted to brooding," continued Zaro, "You

also, Gelimer, are no longer like the Vandals of Geiseric. You, too, are infected, not by Roman vices, but by Roman or Greek or Christian subtleties. What shall I call them—gnosticism, theosophy, mysticism? Which is the most respectful name? I confess I do not know, for to my mind they all have little meaning. How glad I am our father did not entrust my education also to the philosophers and priests! Ah! he noticed early that the helmet alone was suited to Zaro's thick skull, and the stylus would not stick behind his ear. But you indeed! I always felt as if I were entering a dungeon, when I visited you in your gloomy, high-walled monastery. Many, many years have you dreamed away and lost there among your books."

"They were not lost," replied Gibamund. "Did he not also find time to become the first hero of his people? On him rest the hopes of the Vandals."

"Upon the whole house of the Asdings; we have not degenerated," spoke the king. "But can a single family, even though it be the ruling one, stay the downfall of an entire people, or raise a sinking nation?"

"Hardly," said the priest with a shake of the head. "For who can say for himself that he is

free from guilt? And," he added slowly, suddenly raising his eyes and fixing them full upon Gelimer, "the sins of the fathers—"

"Stop!" cried the king, with a moan as if in deep suffering. "Not this thought now—when I must act, direct, plan. It cripples me." And he pressed his hand to his forehead.

"In the present also," continued Verus, "the sins of the people are altogether too great. They cry aloud to Heaven for vengeance. Just now I had to go to administer consolation to a dying man—"

"Even as chancellor of the realm," said Gelimer, turning towards his brothers, "he does not forget the duties of the priest."

"When near the southern gate, there came once more to my ears from that grove of all sins the revolting sounds of drunken revelry. Lascivious songs—"

"What!" the king exclaimed angrily and struck the marble table with his fist. "Do they dare defy my orders? Did I not command before my departure for Hippo that all these games and feasts should cease? Did I not name yesterday as the positive limit of time when the grove must be vacated and the pleasure-houses closed? I sent thither three hundred lancers to see that my

commands were executed. What are they doing?"

"In so far as they do not join in the dancing and the drinking, they fall asleep, tired out by pleasure and stupefied by the wine which they, like all the rest, obtain there. I saw a company of them lying asleep under the archway of the gate."

"Then terrible shall be their wakening!" cried the king. "Are our sins indeed about to devour us?"

"The evil of that grove seems to be incurable," said Zaro.

"What the sword cannot cure, fire will," threatened the King. "I will burst upon them like the wrath of God. Follow me, my brothers!" and he rushed from the room.

"Summon quickly a couple of hundred horsemen Gibamund," advised Zaro, as the brothers hurried after the king. "The royal guard under the faithful Markomer. For the Vandals no longer obey the king's word, unless at the same time they see the gleam of the king's steel."

With a slow step, slightly nodding his head from time to time and whispering softly to himself, the archdeacon followed the three Asdings.

X.

WHILE the lower city of Carthage extended on the north to the harbor, directly outside of its southern gate, and occupying a space of about two leagues in length and one in width, lay the so-called "Grove of Venus," or "Grove of the Holy Virgin." Far back in the old pagan times it had been a place set apart for the riotous practice of every voluptuous and wanton pleasure, until throughout the whole Roman Empire the epithet "African" became a synonym for unbounded excess.

The whole of this portion of the coast, saturated by the moisture from the sea-wind, had originally been covered with thick forests. The larger part of these had long since been forced to yield to the expanding city; but a considerable tract had been preserved by command of the emperors, and, several centuries before, had been transformed into a superb park, laid out with all the taste and all the extravagance of the time of the Cæsars.

The predominating feature in the landscape of this park was formed by the date-palms, which

had been introduced by the Phœnicians. This queen of the desert, the Arabians say, loves to plunge its feet into the moist sand and its head into the very fire of the sun. These palms had thrived here magnificently, and in their hundred years of growth had lifted their slender, pillar-like trunks to a height of fifty feet. No ray of sunlight could penetrate directly through the roof formed by the bending leaves of their green crowns, which rustled and swayed gently in the wind, inviting and lulling all who came within their influence to dreamy revery and sleep. However, they stood at sufficient intervals apart for the light and the air to find free admission from the side, while lower trees, like the dwarf palm, and bushes and flowers, grew in profusion beneath the shade of the lofty tops.

In addition to the palms, the hand of man first, and afterwards luxuriant nature, had planted and nourished here many other noble trees—the plane-tree with its glistening bark, the cypress, the laurel, the olive, which loves the salt breath of the sea, the quince with its fragrant fruit, the pomegranate, here so thoroughly domesticated that it was called “the Carthaginian apple;” while figs, apricots, peaches, almonds, chestnuts, oleanders, and myrtles, partly as tall trunks an-

partly as bushes, formed the undergrowth of this magnificent palm-forest.

The art of landscape gardening, which in the time of the Cæsars had attained a perfection that has scarcely since been equalled, combined with the abundant irrigation afforded by an elaborate system of aqueducts and water-courses, had brought forth here, on the verge of the so-called desert, wonders of beauty, above all a luxuriant, thick green turf, which even in the hottest days of summer showed scarcely any dried patches.

From time to time the wind had wafted the seeds from the numerous flower-beds, and now, scattered everywhere through the grass, the flowers shone forth in all the brilliant colors with which the African sun loves to paint them.

The flower-beds themselves, which were distributed through the entire park, suffered somewhat in appearance from a certain monotony. The great diversity which decorates our modern gardens was here lacking. Roses, lilies, narcissuses, violets, and anemones were almost the only species present, but these were in rich variety, of peculiar and artistically produced colors, and often brought to bloom before or after their natural time. Effect was sought to be gained by heaping together huge masses of the same kind

or color. Thus the great beds of white or red lilies often extended for a hundred paces in length or breadth. From their swelling cups, as the warm wind passed over them, came a sweet, but too powerful, an almost cloying fragrance.

Amid this world of trees, bushes, and flowers, the emperors, who in former times had often resided here, the governors, and still more frequently the richer inhabitants of Carthage, had caused to be erected an almost incredible number of buildings of every sort. For centuries patriotism, a sense of duty, and often mere ostentation and vanity, had prompted the wealthier citizens to keep alive the remembrance of their names by decorative monuments, pleasure-gardens, and buildings designed for public use. This feeling of local pride and patriotism had by no means become extinct. The military highway which traversed the grove from north to south was now bordered on both sides by costly sepulchres with only short spaces between them. Beyond these, and scattered throughout the whole extent of the park, were baths, ponds, small lakes with marble quays and elegant pleasure-boats, circuses, amphitheatres, race-courses, open porticos, and temples with their subsidiary buildings.

As the grove had been originally consecrated to

Aphrodite, or Venus, the statues of this goddess and those of Cupid were everywhere the most numerous. Christian zeal, however, had knocked off the head, the nose, and the breasts from many a Venus, and only in rare cases had left Cupid's bow unbroken. Some of the heathen temples, too, since the time of Constantine had been converted into Christian oratories and churches, but by no means all; and many of these temples withdrawn from the services of the pagan religion, yet not devoted to the Christian, had become, with their gardens and grottos, resorts for drunkenness, gambling, and still more glaring vices. The gods had been driven out, and the demons had slipped in.

Among the hundred or more buildings in the grove, two were especially prominent in popular favor. Both were situated near the southern gate of the city and were in close proximity to each other. They were the "Old Circus" and the "Amphitheatre of Theodosius."

The "Old Circus" had been built when Carthage was at the height of its prosperity, and the vast structure, with its eighty thousand seats, had been arranged according to the requirements of that populous epoch. But since the Vandal conquest many Roman families had emigrated or had been

banished, so that at the time of our narrative whole rows of seats were left unoccupied. The rich bronze ornamentation with which the structure had been adorned had in many places been broken off and carried away; not, however, by the Vandals, but by the Roman inhabitants of the city and by the peasants of the vicinity.

The tiers of marble seats rose from within in the manner of an amphitheatre and rested upon a high-vaulted substructure of granite. On the outside the circus was surrounded by arcades with numerous entrances and flights of steps, besides the niches which served as shops, taverns, bakeries, fruit-stalls, and dining-rooms. Here continually, day and night, lounged a crowd of disorderly people, while from some of the larger spaces, which were shut off by curtains from the gaze of the passers-by, [came the sound of cymbals, small kettle-drums, and castanets, announcing that for a couple of copper coins admittance could be had to the performances of Syrian and Egyptian dancing girls.

XI.

THE sultry heat of an African summer day still rendered the air of the grove oppressive, although the sun had long since sunk into the sea, and the short twilight prevailing here had faded into darkness. Already the full moon was rising above the tops of the palms, and was pouring its magic light upon woodland, meadow, and lake, upon the white or light-colored stonework of the buildings, and upon the marble statues which gleamed with an almost fantastic beauty amid the dark green setting of the shrubbery.

In the more remote parts of the grove no discordant features marred the peaceful influence of this soft, silvery moonlight; a deep and solemn stillness prevailed, broken only from time to time by the call of some night-bird. But from the vicinity of the gate, from the two principal buildings, from the lawns and the gardens surrounding them, arose a confused noise from many thousands of revellers. All the instruments with which the musical art of the time was acquainted were sending forth sounds without regard to concert or harmony, each apparently endeavoring to make

itself heard above the din of the rest. Cries of delight, of intoxication, of angry altercation, broke forth in Latin, Greek, Moorish, and especially in the Vandal tongue. For perhaps the greatest number and unquestionably the noisiest part of the "guests of the Grove," as these devotees of pleasure termed themselves, belonged to the ruling race, which here riotously satisfied at once its desire and its capacity for enjoyment.

From the direction of the southern gate of the city, along the broad road, two men were advancing towards the circus. They were clad in strictly German dress—a circumstance which attracted not a little attention. For almost all the Vandals, except the royal line, either had exchanged the German garb and arms for the Roman, or, from convenience, effeminacy, or desire for ornament, had at least adopted some Roman features. But these two men wore regular German cloaks and helmets, and carried distinctively German arms.

"What an uproar! What crowding and pushing!" said the elder of the two, a man of middle height, who with keen glances observed all that was going on around him.

"And it is not the Romans," replied the other, "who are the most boisterous and turbulent, but our worthy cousins."

"Was I not right, friend Theudigisel? Here, among the people themselves, we shall learn in one night more that serves our purpose than we could gain in a correspondence of many months with this book-learned king."

"It is scarcely credible, although we see it here before our eyes."

Just then their attention was attracted by the loud tones of voices behind them. Two negroes, naked except for a short apron of peacock's feathers, worn about the loins, and each swinging a golden staff around his curly head, sought to clear a path for a small procession that followed.

"Make way!" they cried repeatedly, "make way for the noble Modigisel!"

But they did not succeed in penetrating the throng; their cries simply attracted a greater crowd of the curious. Therefore the eight similarly clad, or, more strictly speaking, unclad Moors who came after them were compelled to set down their burden, a richly-gilded, half-open litter. It had a back formed from small purple cushions joined together and held in place by cross-pieces of ivory, from the ends of which waved the feathers of the ostrich and flamingo.

"Say, my friend," spoke the younger of the two strangers, turning to the occupant of the

litter, a blond-haired Vandal of perhaps twenty-seven years of age, who was dressed in white silk, brilliantly adorned with gold and jewels, "do you have as merry a time as this every night here?"

The man addressed was evidently astonished that any one should have the audacity to accost him, so unceremoniously. He opened with an effort two sleepy eyes and turned to his companion—for now there was visible beside him a young woman of extraordinary, but almost too voluptuous beauty. So extravagantly was she adorned with jewelry that a dull yellow shimmer seemed to overlay her fair white skin. The expression of her faultlessly regular, but sphinx-like countenance, that bore in it no trace of human sympathy or moral worth, was that of an easily wearied, but still unsated sensuality. She resembled a wondrously beautiful, but capricious and treacherous animal. The personal charms of such a woman possessed an overmastering power to dazzle and to fascinate, but could not awaken love; just as the golden chains, circlets, rings, and ornamental plates which her Junnoian form displayed beneath the scanty drapery she wore, served rather to attract attention than to enhance the effect of her beauty.

"Oh—ah!—I say—Astarte!" drawled her

companion in a tone so languid that only long practice could have enabled him to acquire it—for he had heard from a Greek exquisite from Byzantium that it was good form to speak in such a voice. “Scarecrows—both of them—aren’t they?” And he pushed back, sighing at the exertion required, the thick wreath of roses which had slipped from his brow down over his eyes. “It is thus they describe Geiseric and his gray-beards. Just see—ah!—one of them has a mantle of wolf-skins! The other carries—in the Grove of Venus—a heavy spear! You ought—yonder—in the circus—to exhibit yourselves for money, monsters.”

The younger of the strangers started angrily, and clutched the handle of his sword. “If you knew to whom—” But the older man motioned to him to be silent.

“You must certainly have come from a distance,” continued the Vandal, somewhat aroused from his languor by the appearance of the strangers, “that you ask such questions. In this grove of the love-goddess one night is much like another. Only now it is a little merrier than usual. The richest of our nobles celebrates his marriage to-night, and he has invited all Carthage to be present.”

Here the voluptuous beauty at his side raised herself a little. "Why do you waste time in talking with these rough satyrs? See, the lake is already aglow with red light! The voyage of the galleys is beginning. I wish to see the handsome Thrasaric."

At this name her expressionless features became for a moment animated, and the great, dark, impenetrable eyes cast an eager glance into the distance; then the long lashes drooped again and she sank back once more upon the cushions. Her deep black hair rose from the crown of her head to the height of more than two hand-breadths, and was encircled by five golden bands joined together by small silver chains. But this luxuriant growth, by reason of the coarseness and stiffness of each single hair, resembled somewhat too closely the mane of a superb horse.

"Will you not," cried her companion in a voice so energetic that its former feeble drawl was shown to have been pure affectation—"will you not, Astarte, you insatiate creature, be content for the present with the less handsome Modigisel? Later, of course, we can—change. You are getting too bold since your emancipation."

And he gave her a thrust in the side with his elbow. It was meant to be affectionate, but the

Carthaginian curled slightly her upper lip so that her small, sharp, white teeth became visible. Trifling as the movement was, it reminded one of the great cat-like animals of her native land, especially as at the same time her eyes contracted like those of an irritated tiger, and her superbly chiselled head was slightly lifted, as if silently threatening a future revenge.

Modigisel had not noticed it. "I obey my divine mistress," he drawled again in his foppish voice. "Forward!" And since the poor blacks—so perfectly had he struck the fashionable tone—really had not understood him, he now bellowed like a bull, "Forward, you dogs, I 'say!" And with a force that was scarcely to be looked for in the rose-crowned coxcomb, he struck with his fist the nearest slave and knocked him off his feet. Without a word the man arose, and with the seven others grasped the gilded pole and bore the litter on through the throng.

"Did you see her?" said the younger stranger to the one with the wolf-skin mantle.

"Yes; she is like a black panther, or like this land—beautiful, fiery, malignant, and deadly. Come, Theudigisel. Let us also go to the lake. The most of the Vandals are assembling there, and we can learn what we desire. Here across

the grass is a foot-path that seems to be shorter than the road."

"Take care; do not stumble, my lord. What is that lying there—right across the path?"

"A soldier—in full armor too—a Vandal."

"And sound asleep. In the midst of all this noise!"

"He must be very drunk!" And the elder man poked the sleeper with the butt-end of his spear. "Who are you, fellow?"

"I?—I?" The man thus rudely awakened raised himself on his elbow and seemed to be anxiously racking his brains. "I believe I am—Gunthamund—Guntharic's son."

"What are you doing here?"

"You see I am keeping guard: What are you laughing at? I keep watch that in the Grove no more— But where are the others? Haven't you any wine? I am fearfully thirsty." And he sank back on the tall, soft grass.

"These, then, are the guards of the Vandals! Do you still give the same counsel, valiant duke, as you gave before—beyond the sea?"

With a shake of his head the other followed in silence.

XII.

ON the southern shore of the lake, directly opposite the marble haven in which the sheet of water terminated, a broad staging had been erected for invited guests, a balcony, extending out over the lake and decorated with purple silk, being reserved for the most distinguished.

Suddenly the soft moonlight which lay upon the surface of the water was changed into a brilliant red light, that lasted for about a minute. As it died out, a blue one flamed up in its stead, then a green, bringing into clear view the groups of spectators on the shore, the white marble buildings in the distance, the statues among the shrubbery, and above all the surface of the lake, with the rich and astonishing pageant which was there presented.

From the haven, behind whose high walls they had hitherto remained concealed, glided, to the music of flutes and the clang of cymbals, a whole flotilla of boats, barges, and galleys of every sort. Ten, twenty—soon there were fifty vessels, fantastically shaped, some as dolphins, sea-dogs, or

gigantic water-fowl, and many as dragons, the banner-emblem of the Vandals.

Masts, yards, sails, the high, pointed prows, as well as the upper part of the oar-handles, were twined round, almost to complete concealment, with garlands of flowers, with broad, variegated ribbons, and with gold and silver fringe. Costly carpets covered the entire deck and extended down over the stern into the water, streaming out behind as the ships moved along.

Grouped about the mast, or arranged upon the upper deck of every vessel, was a picturesque tableau, formed by Vandal men, young maidens, and handsome boys. Male and female slaves, white, yellow, and black, poured forth unmixed wine from richly-ornamented pitchers, which, without spilling and without appearance of unusual exertion, they carried around upon their heads.

Thus the gayly-decorated boats glided out into the red glow on the surface of the lake. And now through their midst a pathway opened, and the great wedding-galley came in sight, moving, as it seemed, without oarage, and far surpassing all the rest in fantastic and extravagant splendor. It was drawn along apparently only by eight superb swans, which were linked together in pairs by golden chains attached to their necks. These

creatures, evidently trained for this purpose with the utmost care, gave no heed to the noise and the light around them, but directed their course with majestic ease straight toward the balustrade on the southern shore.

The deck of the galley was strewn a foot deep with roses. About the mast an open arbor was arranged from branches of the natural vine. In this arbor lay the huge bridegroom, a Hercules almost seven feet in height, with his thick, shaggy red hair crowned with red roses and grape-leaves. A panther's skin covered the upper part of his body, a purple cloth was girt about his loins, his great right hand, which hung down limp at his side, grasped a thyrsus. Clinging close to his mighty breast was the slender, almost child-like form of a young girl.

Her countenance could not be seen; for, scarcely in keeping with her rôle of the abandoned Ariadne, she had fastened the Roman bridal-veil upon her hair. The noise seemed to terrify her. Shyly she concealed her head under the panther's skin upon the giant's breast. Only from time to time she cast a quick, furtive glance upward, seeking to catch his eye; but he did not see her. For a naked boy of about twelve years, with golden wings upon his shoulders and a bow and quiver

fastened to his back by a golden band, kept filling for the bridegroom a huge drinking-cup, and the latter seemed to think that the costume he wore demanded that he should drain it every time at a draught—a performance which distracted his attention from his bride more than was strictly commendable.

Upon a pillow, placed somewhat above the bridal pair, reposed, in a picturesque attitude, a beautiful maiden of about eighteen years, her head supported on her left hand, and her golden-brown hair arranged simply in a Grecian knot. She was incomparably more beautiful than the Carthaginian Astarte, both in the faultless symmetry of her Grecian figure and in the refined purity of her noble face. Two tame white doves sat upon her right shoulder. She wore a white garment that extended down below her knee, serving, however, more for adornment than for vesture. The thin silken material was held together upon her hips by an elaborately wrought golden girdle, from which hung a Phœnician purple apron, ornamented with golden tassels. Her sandals rested upon a mass of stiff white and gray silk, disposed so as to represent the waves of the sea, and coming up around the ankles of the “foam-born goddess.”

When the ship, drawn along by its swans, came

in full sight of the thousands of assembled spectators, a deafening shout of applause greeted the brilliant pageant. As, however, it glided out into the clear light, the Venus impulsively and as if in desperation sought to conceal herself. Grasping a large piece of coarse sail-cloth which lay beside her, she drew it over her, covering herself with it as far as possible.

"How barbaric is the whole display!" whispered below the staging, on the shore opposite the haven, one Roman to another, in the harsh guttural tones that characterized the African Latin.

"That is supposed to be a representation of Bacchus, neighbor Laurus."

"And Ariadne."

"The Venus would please me better."

"I suppose so, friend Victor. It is the beautiful Glauca, the Ionian. She was recently stolen from Miletus by pirates, and sold in the forum near the harbor to Thrasabad, the bridegroom's brother. She is said to be the child of respectable parents. And she cost her owner the price of two estates."

"She gazes sadly enough, with drooping lashes, down into the sea."

"And yet it is said that her master treats her

with the greatest kindness and is madly in love with her."

"Quite likely. She is wonderfully—divinely beautiful."

"But this bear from Thule, this Scythian buffalo, a Bacchus!"

"With those elephant's bones!"

"And the big, fiery red beard!"

"He would not clip it off—that and the shaggy fleece upon his head—if by so doing he could in reality become the god he represents."

"Just so! A Vandal noble in his own estimation is something better than even gods or saints."

"And yet they were all once only cattle-thieves and pirates!"

"But see: over the vines that are twined around his thighs he has buckled on his broad German sword-belt!"

"Perhaps purely out of decency," laughed the other. "And in fact our Bacchus over there carries in his belt a Vandal short-sword."

"It seems to me the barbarian is ashamed to exhibit himself thus as a naked god."

"He has not, then, lost *all* his sense of shame!" exclaimed in indignant tones, a passer-by who had evidently overheard the last remark.

"Did you understand that? It was that one, over there—the one with the spear. His speech did not sound like that of a Vandal."

"But very like it. They talk that way over in Spain. I have heard them at Hispalis."

"Hark! what a howling on the boats!"

"Why, that is a marriage-hymn, Victor. The bridegroom's brother composed it. For now the barbarian noblemen compose Latin and even Greek verses. Pretty poor verses they are, too!"

"I'm afraid, Laurus, you are hardly a fair critic. Since your leather business collapsed, you have lived by poetry. Weddings, baptisms, funerals, are all the same to you. You have even celebrated in song the victories of the Vandals over the Moors and—God have mercy on us!—the valiant sword of King Hilderic. It is said, indeed, that you are more ready to compose for the barbarians than for the Romans."

"Of course I am. The barbarians understand less, ask for less, and pay more. For the same reason, Victor, you in your wine-shop must wish that the Vandals may remain masters in Carthage."

"Why so? You may not be so wide of the mark."

“Well, now, the barbarians know as little about good wine as they do about good verses.”

“They can tell it well enough. But they are always parched with such a raging thirst that they gulp down and pay for the sour wine also. Alas for us when we have no more stupid barbarians for customers! In our old days we will have to furnish better wine and better poetry.”

“The ships will soon be here. Now we can see all distinctly. Look at the bridegroom’s monstrous drinking-cup! The little Cupid can scarcely carry it. It seems to me I recognize it.”

“Why, certainly! That is the bronze drinking-cup from the fountain of Neptune in the Forum. It is larger than the head of a child.”

“Right! It has been missing for several days. I believe the Germans would drink the ocean dry, if it were full of wine.”

“And just see the mass of gold they have hung upon the poor Venus!”

“Every bit of it stolen Roman property. She can scarcely move under the weight of her ornaments.”

“Modesty, Victor, womanly shame! She has little else on her except jewelry.”

“Not the poor girl’s fault, it seems. The Cupid,—the presumptuous scamp—has just pulled

the sail-cloth away from her and pitched it into the lake. See her distress! Look with what shame she seeks to conceal herself. She begs the bride—she points to the large piece of white silk at the latters' feet."

"The little Ariadne nods; now she picks up the silk and throws it over Aphrodite's shoulders—what a look of thanks she receives!"

"Now they are about to land. I am sorry for the bride. She is the daughter of a free-born Roman citizen, although of Grecian descent. And her father—"

"Where is Eugenēs? I do not see him on the wedding-galley."

"He is ashamed, I suppose, to show himself at the sacrifice of his child. Some time before the marriage he set out with his Sicilian friend to Utica to purchase grain, and, shortly after their return, they went together to Syracuse. This is just like the old offering of maidens that the Athenians used to make to the Minotaur. He is sacrificing Eugenia, the daintiest jewel of Carthage."

"They say, however, that she would have it so—that she is in love with the ruddy giant. And he is not bad-looking."

"He is a barbarian. Now, a curse, say I, upon

all bar— I beg your pardon, my good sir ! May St. Cyprian grant you a long life !”

Hastily he sank upon his knees before a half-drunken Vandal who had run headlong into him and passed on without noticing the Roman’s existence.

“ But, Laurus, the barbarian ran into you, not you into him,” said Victor, helping his companion to his feet.

“ All the same ! They are very ready with their short-swords, these masters of ours. I would they were all in Hades !”

XIII.

IN the mean time the ships had reached the shore. As they drew up beside one another along a broad space of rising ground, they were greeted with a burst of music from the balcony. Then from their prows flights of steps were let down, covered with soft carpets, and strewn with flowers. Upon these the bridal pair and their friends descended, while by means of similar steps the invited guests came down from the raised platform. Both groups now formed on the shore into a

festal procession. A handsome, but somewhat effeminate-looking young Vandal, with a winged hat upon his blond locks and winged sandals on his feet, hurried about in all directions, swinging an ivory staff encircled by golden snakes. He seemed to be the director of the fête.

"Who is that?" asked Victor. "The owner of the beautiful Aphrodite? He nods to her. And she replies with a smile."

"Yes, that is Thrasabad," said Laurus, angrily, clenching his fist, though not very boldly. "May St. Cyprian put scorpions in his bed! A Vandal poet! A man who spoils my trade for me—for me, the pupil of the great Luxorius."

"Pupil? I thought you were—"

"His slave, then his freedman. I have filled many an ass's skin with the verses I have copied for him."

"But not as his pupil—"

"You do not understand the matter. The entire art of poetry consists of about a dozen shrewd little devices. One learns them best by copying, because they are all the time repeating themselves. But this barbarian composes gratis. Naturally he must be pleased if anybody listens to him."

"He leads the procession—as Mercury."

"A nice sort of Mercury! The only part of the character he can understand is stealing. These noble Germans, when they want a piece of property, have a way of killing the owner, and then they call the affair a 'feud.'"

"See! he has given the signal to set out for the circus. Let us go too."

The Mercury had held out his hand to the Venus to assist her in landing. "Have you come back to me at last?" he whispered tenderly. "For two hours I have been deprived of you, my beautiful one. Indeed I love you with my whole heart."

A charming smile lit up her face; thankfully, lovingly she raised her eyes to his. "That is the only reason why I still live," she murmured.

"You are melancholy to-night, my Aphrodite."

"I am not your Aphrodite! I am your Glauca."

Taking her hand, Thrasabad led the procession, which wended its way, not without some delays, through the gaping crowd.

As soon as the company had entered the circus numerous slaves assigned places to the guests, according to their rank or according to the estimation in which they were held by the giver of the entertainment. The most honorable positions

were the foremost rows of seats, originally intended for the senators of Carthage, but now remaining unoccupied. Empty also was the *pulvinar*, on the long southern side, the imperial box, in which many a predecessor of Gelimer had sat. On the northern side, opposite, however, not to the *pulvinar*, but to the eastern end, the *porta pompae*, the seats for the bridegroom and his nearest friends were built out similarly to the imperial box, but much further. Through the *porta pompae*, a gate in the centre of the compartments for the chariots, the grand procession came before the beginning of the races. From this point the course ran towards the west, where it rounded off into a semicircle. Here the victors passed out through the *porta triumphalis*. Running east and west along the length of the course and separating this into two parts was a low wall, the *spina*, richly decorated with columns, obelisks of dark green marble, and small statues of the conquerors in former contests. At the east and also at the west end of the *spina* were the goals, the former called the *meta prima*, the latter the *meta secunda*. The chariots entered the arena through two gates on the eastern side. Finally, on the southern side, in a half-concealed position between the stalls and the imperial box, was placed the mournful gate,

the *porta Libitinensis*, through which the dead and wounded charioteers were borne from the track.

In the principal box, in addition to the bride and groom, a number of others, both men and women, had been assigned seats, among them Modigisel and his fair companion Astarte. Here, as soon as all the guests had taken their places and order had been established, the Mercury appeared, bowed courteously to the bridal pair, and began:

“Permit, my divine brother, son of Semele—”

“Stop there, little one,” interrupted the bridegroom, turning towards the Mercury, who was perhaps a couple of inches shorter than Bacchus, but still considerably over six feet in height; “I’m afraid you’ve been drinking too much Adrumesiner wine, or else some of that Grassiker which I myself sucked up out of the ‘ocean.’ Evidently it is you who are drunk instead of me. Our worthy father’s name was Thrasamer—not Semele.”

Smiling with an air of superior knowledge and exchanging glances with Aphrodite, who also was seated in the same company, the poetical Vandal proceeded:

“Grant that before the beginning of the sports I may recite my wedding-poem—”

"No, no, little brother!" said the giant, hastily. "I would rather, much rather not. The verses are—"

"Not smooth enough, you think? What do you know about hiatus and—"

"Nothing at all. But the sense—so far as I could comprehend it! You were good enough to read it to me three times—"

"And five times to me," said Aphrodite, with a smile that became her admirably. "I begged him to burn the verses. They are neither pretty nor good."

"What they contain," continued Thrasaric, "is so extravagant—in fact, so immodest—"

"Imitated from the best Roman models," grumbled the poet.

"That may be. Perhaps that is just the reason. I felt ashamed when I listened to them in private. I could not possibly in the presence of these women—"

Here a shrill laugh broke on his ear.

"You are laughing, Astarte?"

"Yes, handsome Thrasaric, I am laughing. You Germans are incorrigible; bashful boys with the limbs of giants."

The little bride cast an imploring glance upon her husband, but he did not see it.

"Bashful? It seems to me that for some time I have been anything but bashful. This rôle of a half-naked god does not suit me at all. I shall be glad, Eugenia, when we are through with all this senseless performance."

She pressed his hand gratefully. "And to-morrow," she whispered, "you will go with me to Hilda? She desires on the first day after our marriage to wish us happiness."

"Certainly. And her wish will bring us happiness. She is the noblest woman in the world. It was her union with Gibamund that first taught me to believe in women and love and the happiness of marriage. It was she who—well, what now, little one? Ah, yes, the sports—the guests! I had forgotten all about them. Well, then, proceed! Give the signal. Let them begin below there."

The Mercury now stepped forward to the white marble balustrade of the boxes and swung his staff twice in the air. Upon this the two gates to the right and left of the stalls flew open, and two trumpeters stepped into the arena, the one on the right clad in blue, the other on the left in green. With a couple of shrill blasts they announced the commencement of the performance.

In the brief interval which ensued before the

entrance of the chariots, Modigisel twitched slightly the panther's skin of the bridegroom.

"Listen!" he whispered; "my Astarte there is fairly devouring you with her eyes. I believe for some time past you have been more to her taste than I. I suppose I ought to kill her, out of jealousy; but—ugh!—it is too hot both for jealousy and for killing."

"I thought," replied Thrasaric, "that she is no longer your slave."

"I have set her free, but she still owes me obedience. Yes! I would certainly kill her for this, if it were not so hot. Besides, I am somewhat satiated with her. Now, your little one there, the slender, pretty Eugenia, pleases me—perhaps on account of the contrast. How would it be, if we—if we should—exchange?"

If Thrasaric heard the proposal, he found no time to reply to it.

Once more the trumpets sounded, and the chariots entered in a stately procession. Five chariots of the "blues" came slowly from the right, five of the "greens" from the left gate. Leek-green and light blue in color were not only the chariots themselves, but the reins and decorations of the horses and the tunics of the chariot-eers. The first three on either side were drawn

by four horses, the usual number. But when the fourth pair appeared with five horses, and the last chariot of both parties with seven, loud shouts of surprise and approbation came from the seats in the upper tiers. These were the least desirable places in the circus, and, although many better rows stood empty, they had been given by the Vandal overseers to the Roman artisans and tradesmen.

"Just look, Victor," whispered Laurus to his neighbor.

"Those are the colors of the parties in Byzantium."

"Yes; these barbarians imitate everything."

"About as well as monkeys imitate flute-playing."

"Only in the toga ought people to visit the circus."

"Like ourselves," said Victor with a self-satisfied air.

"But these Vandals! A few in armor, the rest in garments about as thin as a cobweb."

"Of course. They will never become southerners; only degenerate northern barbarians."

"Just see the lavishness of the display! The wheels, even the felloes, are silvered and then striped with green or blue."

"And the chariots themselves glisten with sapphires and emeralds."

"Where did Thrasaric get all these treasures?"

"Stolen, friend; all stolen from us, as I told you before. Not by him—for the race has grown too indolent in our day even to steal and plunder—but by his father Thrasamer and his grandfather Thrasafrið. He was the right hand of Geiseric. And what that meant, in the line of plundering and fighting, is a story it would take some time to tell."

"What magnificent horses those are in the last chariot—the bay ones! Those are not African."

"Yes, they are; but from Spanish stock, bred in Cyrene. They are the best."

"Especially if a little Moorish blood is added to them, like that of the famous stallion of the Moorish chief Cabaon. It is said a Vandal is now its owner."

"Not likely! No Moor sells such a horse."

"The procession is finished. They are taking their places beside each other before the white cord. Now—"

"Listen! What is the Mercury^{*} announcing?"

"The prizes for the victors. For the four-horse chariots, first prize 25,000 sesterces, second prize 15,000; 40,000 for the victorious five-horse team,

and 60,000—it is unheard of!—for the seven-horse.”

“Look, how the seven horses of the green chariot are pawing the sand! That is Hercules, their driver. He has already five decorations.”

“His opponent is the Moor Chalches. He wears seven badges of victory. See, he lays the whip aside and challenges Hercules to drive without it. He will not dare to accept.”

“Why not? There, he has thrown the whip on the sand. I bet on Hercules. I am for the green,” shouted Victor, excitedly.

“And I for the blue. It is a wager. But hold! Shall we who are Roman citizens make bets on the games of our tyrants?”

“Ah, an excuse! You have no mettle! Or no money!”

“More of both than you! How much? Ten sesterces?”

“Twelve!”

“Good! It is a wager.”

“There, the cord has dropped.”

“Now they are off.”

“Bravo for the green! Already at the first goal—and past it on the inside!”

“Hold there, Chalches! Now let them out! Hurrah! At the second goal Chalches was ahead.”

"Quicker, Hercules! quicker, you sluggard! Keep more to the right—to the right! Or else—Oh, a curse upon you!"

"Ha! by St. Cyprian, victory! There lies the green, as flat as a mashed frog. Victory! The blue has won. Pay up, friend. Where is my money?"

"That doesn't count. I shall not pay. The blue thrust the pole of his chariot into the horse on the left side. That was unfair."

"What? You abuse my color! And you won't pay?"

"Not a copper."

"Oho? Then, you scoundrel, I'll pay you." And there followed a loud thwack as from an open hand against a plump cheek.

"Peace up there in the cloud seats!" called out the Mercury. "It is only two Roman citizens, gentle bride, who are boxing each other's ears. Friend Mandalor above there, go put them out—both of them. Now on with the sports! Carry the green charioteer out through the Libitinen-sian gate. Is he dead? Indeed! Well, proceed. The prizes will be distributed at the close. We have no time to lose. If the king should return from Hippo sooner than we expect, there will be trouble."

XIV.

"BAH!" said Modigisel's neighbor, a haughty-looking noble of distinguished appearance, "we are not afraid. We Gundings can trace back our line almost as far as the Asdings. I do not bow my head before them. Least of all before this pious hypocrite."

"Right, Gundomar; we will defy the tyrant," joined in a younger man.

Here Thrasaric turned his huge head and spoke slowly, but with a significance not to be misunderstood: "Gundomar and Gundobad, you are my guests; but if you speak ill of Gelimer, I will do to you as was done to the two Romans. However much wine may have mounted to my head—nothing against Gelimer. I will not suffer it. He—the noble-hearted!—a tyrant? What do you mean by that?"

"That he has usurped the throne."

"How? He is the oldest of the Asdings."

"After Hilderic. Are you sure that Hilderic was justly deposed and imprisoned?" asked Gundomar.

“Or that the whole thing was not a skilfully concocted plot?” added Gundobad.

“You do not mean to say on Gelimer’s part?” said Thrasaric, threateningly.

“No; but perhaps devised by Verus.”

“It is true there are all sorts of rumors; there is said to have been a warning letter—”

“No matter about that now. But if your noble-hearted bigot learns of these festivities—”

“Then woe to us! It would be—”

“Like the time when you wanted to marry your bride without a priest,” laughed Modigisel.

“I have thanked him ever since for knocking me down. Eugenias are not to be stolen—they are to be humbly sued for.” And nodding to his bride, he clasped her veil-covered little head in his great right hand and pressed it tenderly to his breast. A beaming glance from the large, dark, antelope-like eyes rewarded him.

Modigisel also had discovered the charm that such animation, such a look of happiness, gave to the pure young face, and his eyes rested admiringly upon Eugenia. The latter now rose and whispered in her bridegroom’s ear.

“Certainly, my little bird,” Thrasaric replied.

“When you have made a vow, you must keep it.

Escort her to the entrance, brother. It is just as necessary to keep one's word as to breathe."

The bride, accompanied by several of her young friends, was conducted by Thrasabad through a number of cross-passages out of the circus.

"Where is she going?" asked Modigisel, following her with passionate glances.

"To the Catholic chapel—the one which they have set up close by in the little temple of Vesta. She promised her father to offer up a prayer there before midnight, since she had to renounce the blessing of her church on account of her marriage with a heretic." Just then the graceful form of the bride vanished through the arched door.

Hereupon Modigisel turned again to Thrasaric. "Let me have the little one, and take my stout one in exchange—you'll gain almost a hundred pounds by it. It's true in this climate a man ought to choose a lean sweetheart.—A free Roman woman? Well, I, too, will marry her. I'll not stick at that."

"Keep your exuberant treasure and don't grudge me my slender one. I'm far from being drunk enough to make such an exchange."

At this point Astarte spoke up in a loud voice.

Both men started. Had she heard their low whispering?

"There is nothing to her but skin and bones." And again her sensuous lips slightly curled, showing between them her sharp white teeth.

"And eyes! Such eyes!" exclaimed Modigisel.

"Yes, as big as her entire face. Like those of a chicken that has just crept out of the shell," said Astarte, scornfully. "What is there so remarkable about her?" And her round eyes flashed malignantly.

"A soul, Carthaginian," replied the bridegroom.

"Women have no souls," said Astarte, gazing at him steadily. "So teaches one of the fathers of the church—or some philosopher. In place of souls, some of us have in our veins water, others fire." She stopped, breathing hard. A rich glow suffused her sphinx-like, exquisitely modelled cheeks. She was bewitchingly, demoniacally beautiful.

"Fire!" said Thrasaric, turning away his glance from her burning eyes. "Fire is also the symbol of hell." Astarte made no reply.

"She is beautiful because she is so modest and pure," observed Aphrodite with a sigh, for she, too, had overheard part of the conversation.

"No wonder that you hold fast to her," said

Modigisel in loud, scornful tones. "After your attempt to carry her off failed, you courted the old grain-usurer's little doll as deferentially as some Roman baker or tailor would woo the child of his neighbor the cobbler."

"True enough," said Gundomar; "but he has celebrated his wedding with as much splendor as if he were leading to his house the emperor's daughter."

"Perhaps the splendor of the wedding is more to his taste than the bride," laughed Gundobad.

"Most certainly not," replied Thrasaric, slowly. "But one thing is true: since I know that she is—that she will be mine, my raging passion for her is— But no! it is not so! She is very dear to me. It is the wine—the heat. I have taken so much wine!"

"Against wine the best antidote is—wine," laughed Modigisel. "Here, slaves, bring Bacchus a second ocean."

The wine was brought, and Thrasaric took a long draught.

"Well?" whispered Modigisel. "I will give you to boot besides Astarte my fish-pond, full of mullets, near the royal villa at Grasse—"

"I am no glutton," replied Thrasaric, indignantly.

"I will add to this my pillared hall at Decimum. I have, it is true, given it to Astarte—but she will consent. Will you not?" Astarte nodded in silence. Her nostrils quivered.

Thrasaric shook his shaggy head. "I have more villas than I can live in.—Hark, the blast of a trumpet! Are the races about to begin? Say, little brother! Ah! he is not here. Horses—wine—dice—these are the three greatest of all pleasures. I would barter the future of my soul for the best horse in the world. The best horse!"—and he drank deeply again. "But I lost him through my own folly. I would give ten Eugenias for him."

Here Astarte laid her cold finger gently upon Modigisel's bare arm. He turned around; she whispered a few words to him, and, with a look of joyful surprise, he nodded assent. "The best horse? What is its name? How did you lose it?"

"It is called—I can't pronounce its Moorish name, for it is nothing but a succession of *ch*'s. We, however, named it Styx. It is a three-year-old black stallion of mixed Spanish and Moorish blood, and it was bred in Cyrene. Lately, when our valiant king began the arming and equipment of the troops, it was announced to the Moors that

we nobles needed fine horses. Among many others, Sersaon, the grandson of the old chief Cabaoon, came to Carthage, bringing as usual the best horses of all."

"That is a fact. We know them," confirmed the Vandals.

"But the pearl even of the best was Styx, the black stallion. I am ready to weep with vexation when I remember how I lost him. The Moor who rode him, a youth apparently hardly more than a boy, said that the horse was not for sale. When I urged the matter eagerly, he demanded, with a mocking grin, an unheard-of price, that no man in his senses would pay,—many pounds of gold, I have forgotten how many. I laughed in his face. Then I looked again at the noble animal—commanded my slaves to bring the gold, and placed the leather bag in the Moor's hand. It was in the open court of my house at the Forum of Constantine, and many other horses stood around; some of our lancers also were in the saddle, superintending the examination of the horses. When I had closed the transaction, I said with a sigh to my brother: 'It is a pity to have paid so much money; the beast is scarcely worth it.' 'It is worth more, as you shall see!' cried the saucy Moor, springing upon the horse and bounding

out through the gate, the bag still clutched in his fist."

"That was too bad," said Modigisel.

"His audacity enraged us all. Forthwith we started in pursuit—there were about twenty of us, our best riders, mounted upon the excellent Moorish horses we had just purchased. At the corner of the street he was so near that Thrasabad hurled his javelin at him. Although at our shouts the people ran out from all the cross-streets to stop him on the main highway, he was not stopped. The watch at the southern gate saw us coming and sprang to close it. They did close the gate, but the noble creature had already sped through like an arrow. We followed in pursuit for a half-hour longer; by that time the fugitive had gained so much that we could scarcely see him in the distance, like an ostrich disappearing in the desert. Angry and loudly reviling the faithless Moor, we rode slowly back on our exhausted horses. As we approached my house, there stood the Moor in the court-yard, leaning against the black stallion—he had ridden into the city again through the western gate. 'Do you know now,' said he, 'the value of this noble steed? Keep your gold. He is no longer for sale.' And he threw the bag at my feet and rode slowly and proudly away.

So I lost Styx, the best horse in the world.—
Ha! is this an illusion? Or is it the strong wine?
There—below—in the arena—among the other
horses—”

“Stands Styx,” said Astarte, quietly. .

“To whom does this treasure belong?” shouted
Thrasaric in great excitement.

“To me,” replied Modigisel.

“Have you bought him?”

“No. In the last campaign he was captured,
together with some other horses and a number of
camels.”

“Not by you?” roared Thrasaric. “You
remained at home, as usual, under the protection
of Astarte’s broad shadow.”

“But I sent thirty mercenaries as substitutes.
They found the horse tethered in the camp of the
Moors, and what the mercenaries capture—”

“Belongs to him who hires them,” said Thrasa-
bad, who had just returned to the box.

“This prodigy then belongs—to you—to you?”
cried Thrasaric enviously.

“Yes, now; but to you—whenever you wish.”

“Thrasaric gulped down another cup of wine.

“No! no!” he said. “At least not this way,
not by my deliberate act. Besides, she is free; I

could not give her away like a slave, even if I so wished."

"Only give up your right to her. I will easily find, for money, some ground for nullifying your marriage."

"She is a Catholic, he an Arian," whispered Astarte.

"Yes; that alone would suffice. And then just give me an opportunity—this Gelimer cannot be always interfering."

"No! Be still! Not this way. But—we might leave it to the dice. Then the dice would have done it, not I—it would be destiny. Ah, I cannot, I really cannot—think any more! If I throw the larger number, each one keeps what he has; if I throw less than you, then I will— No! no! I will *not*! Let me sleep a little." And stupefied by wine, in spite of the noise around him, his mighty rose-crowned head sank down upon his arms, which he had folded one upon the other upon the marble balustrade.

Modigisel and Astarte exchanged glances.

"What will you gain by it?" asked the former.
"He does not trade for you, but for the horse."

"At least she, with her nun's face, shall not have him. And my time will come."

"Provided I release you from my protection,"

"You will!"

"I do not know about that."

Oh yes, you will!" said she, fawningly. But at the same time she lifted her head slightly, and her eyes again contracted like the tiger's.

* * * * *

After a brief sleep the bridegroom was wakened by his brother. "Wake up," said the latter; "Eugenia is back. Let her pass to her place—"

"Eugenia!—I have *not* lost her at the dice! I do not want the horse. I have given no promise."

He started in affright, for there, right before him, at the side of the Ionian, stood his bride, her large, dark-brown eyes fixed anxiously, searchingly upon his face. She said nothing, but a deathly paleness lay upon her cheeks. How much had she overheard—or understood? he asked himself.

Thrasabad's slave humbly made way for her.

"Thank you, Aphrodite."

"Oh, do not call me by that name of mockery and disgrace! Call me as my dear parents did before I was stolen away—before I became—booty, a piece of merchandise."

"Thank you, Glauca."

"The race will not take place," lamented Thrasabad, to whom a freedman had just delivered a message.

“Why not?”

“Because no one will wager against the black stallion which Modigisel has entered. It is Styx. You know the horse.”

“Yes, I know him. But I have promised nothing, Modigisel?” asked he eagerly, but with lowered voice.

“Of course you have—to leave it to the dice. Don’t you remember?”

“Impossible!”

“You said, ‘If I throw the greater number, each shall keep what he has; if I throw less—’”

“O God! Yes, I remember!—It is nothing, little bride. Pay no attention to me.”

Then he turned to Modigisel. “Give me back my word,” he whispered.

“Never!”

“You can break it, you know,” said Astarte, scornfully.

“Serpent!” he cried, and raised his fist. But with an effort he controlled himself, and the stalwart giant, helpless as a bear entangled in a net, turned again entreatingly to Modigisel.

“Release me!”

But the young noble shook his head. “I withdraw my horse from the race,” said he loudly to

Thrasabad. "It is glory enough that no one dares to compete with him."

"Then the race can come off—but at the end. First, there are two surprises which I have prepared for you in another place. Come, Glauca, your hand. Follow me, all ye guests of Thrasaric—follow me to the amphitheatre."

XV.

WITH a flourish of trumpets this invitation was announced by criers throughout the whole great building, and in consequence of the excellence of the arrangements and the number of exits the circus was soon empty.

Then, accompanied by the soft music of flutes, the thousands of guests and spectators proceeded in a gay procession to the neighboring amphitheatre.

This was an oval-shaped building, with the longitudinal axis of its inner ellipse about two hundred and forty feet in length. Its arrangement resembled that of the circus: an oval outer wall rising in two stories of archways, each tier adorned with statues and columns. Here also

from the level of the arena the rows of seats ascended in the manner of steps, and were divided into triangular sections by passages which led to the exits. Between the amphitheatre and the adjacent lake there was a subterranean connection.

The host and his most distinguished guests took their seats in a raised gallery extending out directly to the arena, the *podium*, which formerly had been reserved for the senators of Carthage.

On one side of the arena were a number of grated cells, or cages, partly concealed by curtains. From these cages the savage and confused cries of many sorts of wild animals greeted the ears of the entering guests. But the growls and the yelps were suddenly hushed, as a long ominous howling, that gradually deepened into a roar, came from the largest of the cells. So dread was its import that the smaller occupants of the neighboring cages grew silent, as if abashed.

"Are you afraid, little one?" Thrasaric asked his bride, as he led her in by the hand. "You are trembling."

"Not through fear of the tiger," she replied.

When the seats of honor were filled, Thrasabad once more appeared, bowed, and said: "It is true the Roman emperors have for a long time

forbidden gladiatorial combats and fights in the arena with wild beasts. But we are not Romans. I know, too, that by our kings—especially King Gelimer—the prohibition has been renewed—”

“If he should learn of it,” said Thrasaric uneasily.

“Bah! He is not expected until to-morrow. If he should come back earlier, he will be delayed at the Capitol, and it is two good leagues from there to this place. The noise of our festivities cannot possibly be heard at such a distance. And we need say nothing about the matter to him to-morrow.”

“And the gladiators?”

“They will not. Dead men do not talk. We shall let them fight until there is no one left to betray us.”

“Little brother, this seems to me almost too—Roman.”

“Ah! only the Romans knew how to live, our bear-like ancestors, at best, how to die. Do you suppose I have occupied myself only with the study of Roman poetry? I am proud to say that I can also imitate their customs.—Speak up, Gundomar, are we afraid of King Gelimer?”

“We nobles of the Vandals do not permit any one to dictate in matters which concern our pleas-

ures. Let him attempt to drive us from this place !”

“ And at my brother’s marriage an exception is proper, in fact demanded. Therefore I will feast your eyes with old-fashioned Roman sports and with old-Roman gladiatorial combats.”

A loud shout of applause was the answer to this announcement. Thrasabad disappeared to give his commands.

“ It is easy to understand where he obtains the beasts,” observed Gundomar. “ Africa is their breeding-place. But the gladiators ?”

“ He has confided the secret to me,” answered Modigisel. “ They are partly slaves, partly Moors, captured in the last campaign. The white sand of the arena will soon be red with blood.”

“ That will be splendid !” exclaimed Astarte with such unusual fervor that even Modigisel gazed at her with a slight shudder.

“ Gladiators !” said Thrasaric doubtfully. “ Eugenia, do you want to go ?”

“ I will close my eyes—and stay. Only let me be near you. Do not send me away, I beseech you.”

Here the loud beating of drums put a stop to further conversation, and a cry of astonishment

burst from the thousands that filled the amphitheatre.

The arena divided suddenly from left to right into two half-circles, and each semicircular part, drawn towards the side, disappeared in the masonry. Twenty feet below the vanished arena a new sand-covered surface became visible, and upon this rushed and surged from all sides a vast mass of foaming water that soon changed the bottom of the amphitheatre into a sea. A few moments later broad gates opened on the left and on the right, and there came rowing in two stately war-galleys, fully manned and equipped for battle.

Their tall masts, on account of the necessary lack of wind in an enclosed space, carried no sails, but the yards were filled with archers and slingers.

“Ha! A sea-fight! Excellent! Glorious!” shouted the spectators.

“Look, a Byzantine trireme!”

“And a Vandal pirate-ship! See, how bright is the gleam of its scarlet flag!”

“And above—on the ship’s mast—the golden dragon!”

“The Vandal is going to attack. Where are the rowers?”

“They are not in sight. No doubt they are be-

low the deck. But above—forward on the bowsprit, the crew are massed, with their axes and javelins raised."

"The Byzantine intends to run the Vandal down. Look, how she comes on!"

"Notice her sharp, threatening ram, right at the water-line!"

"But the Vandal ship turns quickly. It has escaped the blow. Now the spears fly."

"There! there a Roman falls on the deck. He does not rise again."

"Another one has fallen overboard."

"Yes, he is swimming."

"No! he has sunk."

"The water around him is all bloody," said Astarte, bending eagerly forward.

"Let me go—oh, let me go away, and come with me!" begged Eugenia.

"Child—not now. You will have to stay now. I must see this," replied Thrasarc.

"Now the Vandal ship lies side by side with the Byzantine."

"They are boarding—our men! How their blond locks stream out! Victory! Victory for the Vandals!"

"But, Thrasarc, they are only masked slaves!"

"No matter! They carry our flag! Victory!"

Victory for the Vandals! Just look what a fearful struggle is going on—man to man! How the shields clash and the axes glisten! Oh, woe! The leader of the Vandals has fallen. If only I were down there on that accursed Roman ship!”

“There, another Vandal is down! Fresh Romans are coming up from below the deck. What perfidy!”

“The Romans have, you see, a superior force. Two more Vandals have fallen.”

“They have enticed ours on board by craft.”

“Brother! Thrasabad! Where are you?”

“Yonder in a small boat near the two contending ships,” said Glauca, in a voice full of anxiety.

“The Vandals are overpowered. They are springing into the water.”

“Those left upon the Roman ship are being bound.”

“Now the Romans are throwing fire at our ship. It is beginning to burn.”

“The mast is all in flames.”

“The helmsman and the rowers jump overboard.”

“But where is Thrasabad?”

The Mercury now appeared again upon the podium.

"Brother," said Thrasaric, "this is a bad omen."

Thrasabad shrugged his shoulders. "The fortune of war. I could not meddle with it. Nothing was prearranged with regard to the result. Dead—five Romans, twelve Vandals. Away! Away with the whole scene! Vanish, ocean!"

He waved his winged staff, and the water with the corpses it contained sank swirling into the abyss. The Roman trireme, obedient to its helm and rowing vigorously to starboard, succeeded in reaching the gate through which it had entered, but the empty, burning Vandal ship was sucked down with the rushing, foaming water into the great funnel beneath. It spun round and round, with constantly accelerated speed, its mast bending more and more to the right and still blazing fiercely, until suddenly the ship gave a lurch and disappeared in the depths below. Gurgling, swirling, and foaming, the rest of the water followed it.

"The sea is gone," cried Thrasabad. "In its stead come the desert and the combats of its monsters."

And at the level of the former flooring, high above the surface of the vanished sea, the semi-circular halves of the arena, with their covering of

white sand were again shoved forward from both sides. Slaves, white, yellow, and black, clad only in aprons, appeared in great numbers and pushed back the curtains which covered the gratings in front of the cages.

"We will now present to you—" began Thrasabad somewhat magniloquently, but he stopped suddenly; for that fearful howl, which during the noise of the naval battle had ceased, or at least had not been heard, broke threateningly again upon the air, and a huge tiger was seen to spring from the back of his tolerably long cage with such force against the bars that these actually bent outward, while splinters of the wood in which they were fastened flew into the arena.

"Brother," said Thrasaric softly, "the cage is too long. Take care! The beast has too much play. And the wood of the floor is too rotten. Are you afraid, Eugenia?"

"I am with you," she answered calmly. "But I do not wish any more men to be fighting or dying—even if I do not look at them."

"Only at the close, little sister-in-law, a captive Moor—"

"Where did you get him?" asked Modigisel.

"Most of them I hired from the slave-dealers. But this one is condemned to death."

"Why?"

"He strangled his master when the latter undertook to scourge him. He is a slender, handsome young fellow, but provokingly obstinate. He will reveal neither his father's name nor that of his tribe. The brother and heir of the murdered man delivered him to me cheap for the sea-fight, and if he should survive it, for the tiger. All our blows could not induce him to take part in the battle. His master had to bind him hand and foot. Now he will be forced to fight. We shall place him, fully armed, in the arena and let loose upon him the tiger, which has not tasted food for two days."

"O Thrasaric, my husband, my first request—"

"I cannot help you, Eugenia. I have promised him a free hand for to-day. And a man's word must be kept, even if it prove to be folly or crime."

"That is true," said Modigisel, bending forward and whispering softly in his ear. "A man must keep his word. When shall we throw?"

White with passion, Thrasaric started up. "I will strike you dead—,"

"That would not help the matter. Astarte

knows about it. Keep your promise, or all the nobles of Carthage shall know to-morrow how to rate your faith and honor."

"I will sooner kill the child with my own hands."

"That would be as dishonorable as if, out of envy, I should in advance stab the black stallion. Keep faith, nobleman! You cannot act otherwise."

Here Modigisel encountered a glance from Eugenia. She could not have overheard; but he became silent.

"And then," said Astarte to Modigisel in a tone just as soft, "when you have her, I become absolutely free."

"I do not know yet," he muttered. "It does not look as if I shall get her."

"Give me my freedom!" persisted Astarte. The words seemed to be a petition, but in her manner of making it there was something so threatening that Modigisel gave a startled glance into her dark eyes. He saw there an expression which he had never yet dared to defy. However, he evaded a response with the roughly-asked question, "What is there in this giant that attracts you as the magnet does iron?"

"His strength," replied Astarte with energy,

“I, too, was strong enough once,” muttered Modigisel, gloomily. “But Africa and Astarte would exhaust the marrow of a Hercules.”

This whispered talk was interrupted by Thrasabad, who, now that the tiger had become silent, resumed his speech :

“We will present for your amusement the following contests : six African bears from the Atlas Mountains with six buffaloes ; a hippopotamus from the Nile with a rhinoceros ; an elephant and three leopards ; an immense tiger—do you hear him ? Be still, Hasdrubal, until you are summoned !—with a Moor in full armor, a Moor who has been condemned to death.”

“Ha ! Good ! That will be fine sport !” came in exclamations of approval from all sides.

“And, finally, if, as we hope, Hasdrubal remains the victor, then the tiger against all the conquerors in the other contests together, and against a pack of twelve British hounds.”

Loud applause greeted this announcement.

“My sincere thanks,” continued the director of the festivities. “But one cannot live solely on thanks. Your Mercury requires ambrosia and nectar. Before we witness any further contests let us refresh ourselves a little. A morsel of food, a draught of cool wine, and a voluptuous dance.

What say ye, my patrons? Come, beautiful Glauca!"

Without waiting for the answer—he seemed to be sure of it even before it burst forth in still livelier shouts of approval—he waved his wand again.

As if by magic the heavy stone walls which separated the *podium* and the higher rows of seats from the arena and the lower rows sank down and transformed themselves into gently descending flights of steps leading to the sand-strewn floor.

At the same time from both sides long tables were moved into the arena by unseen hands. These tables were spread with costly covers and were set with artistically shaped wine-jars, pitches, goblets, and cups of gold and silver, and with broad shallow dishes filled with selected fruits and delicate pastry. In the very midst of the arena rose an altar, its three steps thickly covered with wreaths of flowers and crowned by a figure veiled in white. And from the side came dancing in about a hundred satyrs and bacchantes, whose efforts to catch and to escape formed a pantomimic dance, to the accompaniment of a noisy, intoxicating music of cymbals and drums. But above all the noise, which, indeed, seemed the more to enrage him, rose, each time louder and more threateningly, the howl of the Hyrcanian tiger.

XVI.

MANY of the guests, among them almost all who were in the *podium*, descended to the arena, filled for themselves the wine-cups, and partook of the fruit and the pastry. To those who preferred to retain their places, gayly dressed slaves carried the refreshments along the rows of seats.

As soon as the barriers between the arena and the spectators had been removed, a constant throng of guests streamed back and forth, now going down to the tables, now returning to their places. Many even mingled in the performance of the satyrs and bacchantes, and not infrequently one of the latter was clasped round the waist by a Vandal, who joined with his prize in the wild *abandon* of the dance.

Every moment the merry-making became more chaotic, the cheeks burned with a brighter color, the blond hair and the black mingled together and fluttered out more wildly, and the musicians were compelled to accelerate their time, if they wished to keep pace with the growing passion of the dancers.

To none of the revellers was the wine so wel-

come as to Thrasabad. He was somewhat exhausted by the hurrying from place to place which the duties of his position demanded, and his vanity was greatly excited by the approval his arrangements met with. Cup after cup he drank, as he stood, leaning against a pillar, his feet upon a white panther's skin, which was spread before a small drinking-table. Glauca, whom he held on his arm, gazed at him with anxious looks, but did not dare to utter a warning.

Thrasaric noticed her anxiety. "Little brother," he said, "take care. The director of the festival is the only one who is compelled to remain sober. This Grassiker is strong. And you, my poor brother—you know it yourself—cannot stand a great deal, because you talk too much in your cups."

"There is no—no—danger—at all," replied Thrasabad, already articulating his words with difficulty. "Come, now, Iris and the Cupids!" He raised his wand with a flourish, but it slipped from his hand. Glauca picked it up and placed it at his side.

Suddenly the broad vaulted canopy of white silk which covered the amphitheatre opened, and a shower of flowers, mostly roses and lilies, fell upon the altar, the loaded tables, and the dancers,

while through invisible tubes a fragrant perfume was sprinkled, in the form of a hardly perceptible mist, over the arena and the seats of the spectators.

Then, high up behind the arena and breaking, apparently, through a thick gray cloud, appeared a bright disk, like that of the sun. From it streamed a soft, yellow light.

"Helios smiles through the shower," cried Thrasabad. "Then Iris is not far away."

At these words a rainbow, wonderfully brilliant in its colors, arched itself over the entire extent of the arena, and borne up, as it seemed, on golden clouds, a young maiden, holding gracefully above her head a seven-colored veil, flew slowly from right to left across the scene.

When she had vanished, and the rainbow and the sun had also disappeared, and while the exclamations of astonishment still continued, a group of charming Cupids, children of from four to nine years of age, descended from the openings in the canopy by chains of roses. Received by the slaves and released from their floral bonds, they grouped themselves upon the steps of the altar around the still concealed figure, towards which all eyes were now turned in curiosity.

Then Thrasabad, leaving the drinking-table,

strode over to the altar, still holding on his arm Glauca, who had gently taken the freshly filled cup from his hand. The uproarious applause which now greeted him utterly deprived the vain young man of his little remaining discretion. As he stood upon the top step and dragged after him the vainly resisting Glauca, he staggered, as if about to fall. "Behold, brother!" he cried with unsteady voice, "here is my wedding-present. In the senator's villa at Cirta—what was his name? He was burned to death because he obstinately remained a Catholic—No matter! I bought from the fiscal the confiscated estate; there are magnificent old mosaics there—*hunting-pictures*, with stags, dogs, noble horses, and beautiful women beneath the palm-trees. In rebuilding the cellar, under some broken columns this statue was found; it is said to be more than five hundred years old—a treasure from the best period of Grecian art—so says my freedman, who understands such things—an *Aphrodite*. Brother, I give her to you. Reveal thyself, queen of Paphos!" Grasping a broad knife that lay upon the pedestal, he severed the cords which fastened the wrappings. As these fell away, they revealed a wondrously beautiful, superbly formed *Aphrodite*, sculptured in pure white marble.

The Cupids knelt down at the feet of the goddess and twined their garlands around her knees. At the same time there fell from above upon the altar and the statue a dazzling white light, brilliantly illuminating the arena, which generally was lighted not too distinctly and only by means of lamps.

Greater than even before were the enthusiastic plaudits of the people; on went the frenzied dance, wilder and quicker, and louder swelled the music of the drums and cymbals. But this suddenly increased noise and the glare of light reached also the uncovered cage of the tiger. With a fearful howl he gave a mighty bound against the bars; one of them fell noiselessly outward on the soft white sand. Nobody noticed it. For about the goddess upon the altar a new scene was being enacted.

"Thanks, brother!" cried Thrasaric. "That is certainly the most beautiful woman a man can conceive of."

"Yes," assented Modigisel. "What now, Astarte? Why that mocking smile? What fault can you find with her?"

"Why, that is not a woman," said the Carthaginian, coldly, scarcely parting her lips. "That

is a stone. Go to her, kiss her, if she seems to you more beautiful than—”

“Astarte is right!” shouted Thrasabad, beside himself with excitement. “She is right! Of what use is a Venus made of stone? A cold, dead, marble goddess of love? She folds her arms forever upon her bosom—she cannot open them for a blissful embrace. And how majestic she looks, as if the delights of love were some grave and serious thing! No, marble statue, you are not the fairest woman. The fairest woman—far more beautiful than you—is my Aphrodite here. Mine is the loveliest woman in the world! With envy you shall confess it. I *will* have it so. You shall all confess it.”

And with surprising strength he drew the fair Greek up to him, in spite of all her struggles, placed her upon the broad pedestal of the statue, and pulled fiercely at the white silk which Glauca, while on the ship, had thrown over her bare shoulders and gossamer-like drapery.

“No, no! Desist, my love! Do not disgrace me before the eyes of all,” pleaded the girl, struggling desperately. “Desist—or by the living God—”

But the Vandal, no longer master of himself,

burst into a loud laugh: "Off with these disfiguring wraps!"

And again he sought to tear away the piece of silk and the thin raiment beneath it. But before he could succeed in his purpose a broad knife gleamed in the air—the frantic girl had snatched it from the pedestal—and a warm stream of blood spurted from her bosom into his face. Then her beautiful form sank down at the foot of the marble statue.

"Glauca! Glauca!" cried Thrasabad, sobered at once through horror.

But at that very moment, drowning all the wild turmoil of the music and the dance, was heard from without the amphitheatre the clear, martial blast of a Vandal war-horn. And from the entrance-doors, as well as from the upper rows of seats, which afforded an outlook upon the Grove, burst from a thousand throats the cry:

"The king! The king! King Gelimer!"

Then followed a mad, chaotic attempt to escape from the building, and a struggling, terrified crowd poured forth from every exit.

Thrasaric drew himself up to his full height, took the trembling Eugenia in his strong arms, and sturdily forced his way through the throng.

The voice of the Mercury was no longer heard,

for Thrasabad lay stretched at the feet of the silent marble goddess, clasping in his arms the lifeless body of the beautiful Glauca. And soon he was alone with her in the vast, deserted building.

Without, at some distance, arose the sound of voices in contention. But in the amphitheatre there was the stillness of death. Even the tiger was silent, as if astonished at the sudden quiet and solitude.

It was now past midnight. The wind was rising and playing merrily through the openings in the silken canopy; soon it grew bolder and began chasing the roses that lay scattered upon the floor of the arena.

XVII.

THE guests of Thrasaric stood grouped in the broad open space before the amphitheatre, most of them with the feelings and demeanor of children whom their taskmaster has just detected in some forbidden act.

Thrasaric himself had shaken off the last traces of intoxication. "The king?" said he softly to

himself. "The hero? I am ashamed." And he pushed back from his brow the wreath of roses he wore.

Hereupon Gundomar came up to him with a haughty air, his hand on his sword.

"Son of Thrasamer, fear is a thing you have never yet known. We must defy this tyrant. Show him as firm a front as we shall."

Thrasaric made no reply; he only shook his massive head and repeated to Eugenia, whom he had set down beside him: "I am ashamed to meet the king. And my brother! my poor brother!"

"Poor! Glauca!" sighed Eugenia. "But perhaps she is to be envied."

Again the horns sounded, this time much nearer, and the king, whose approach had been distinctly perceptible for some distance along the straight military highway, came galloping up, far in advance of his followers. Only a couple of slaves with torches had been able to keep pace with him; his brothers, who had stopped to collect a troop of horse, were still far behind. Right before Thrasaric and the nobles who surrounded him the king reined in his panting steed.

"Unprincipled men, lawless people of the Vandals!" he exclaimed in threatening tones. "Is it

thus you obey your king's command? Are you determined to bring the wrath of Heaven upon your heads? Who gave these orgies? Where is their leader?"

"I gave them, O king," said Thrasaric, advancing a step. "I am very sorry. Punish me. But spare him who conducted them at my request—my brother; he has—

"Disappeared together with the dead girl, without leaving a trace," broke in Gundobad. "I wished to summon him to head with us Gundings the common cause of the nobles against this king—"

"For this hour," interrupted Gundomar, "will show whether we are the slaves of the Asdings or free noblemen."

"I, for my part, am tired of being commanded," joined in Modigisel.

"Our blood is in no respect inferior to yours," cried Gundobad angrily to the king. And now around the two Gundings a considerable band of their kinsmen, friends, and followers had gathered, many of them provided with weapons.

Thrasaric was about to advance into the midst for the purpose of preventing the threatened conflict, but before he could do so he was surrounded

by a number of his slaves, accompanied by some belonging to his brother.

"Master," they cried, "Thrasabad has disappeared. What shall take place next? The festival—"

"Is over. Alas that it ever began!"

"But the race over there in the circus?"

"There will be no race. Bring out the horses. Return them to their owners."

"I will not take the stallion back until we have had our throw," called out Modigisel. "I hold you to your word."

"And the wild beasts," urged a freedman. "They are howling for food."

"Let them remain where they are. Feed them."

"And the captive Moor—"

No time was given for an answer. For while the horses, among them the black stallion, were being led out from the circus into the open space between that building and the amphitheatre, loud shouts arose at the portals of the latter.

"The Moor! The prisoner! He has escaped! There he runs! Stop him!"

Thrasaric turned and saw the youthful figure of the Moor coming straight towards him. His hands and feet had been bound with ropes. The

bonds around his feet he had succeeded in tearing off, but not the strong cord, about a foot long, which fastened together his wrists. It hindered him greatly that he could not use his hands to break his way through the crowd.

"Let him go," commanded Thrasaric.

"No!" cried the pursuers. "He has just knocked down his master with a blow of his fist. His master has commanded that he shall die. A thousand sesterces to any one who captures him!"

Upon this stones began to be thrown, and here and there a spear.

"A thousand sesterces!" cried one Roman to another. "Friend Victor, let us become reconciled and earn this money together."

"Agreed! Equal shares, Laurus!"

Meantime the fugitive was running as swiftly as he could towards Thrasaric. The supple, well-formed figure drew nearer and nearer. The flush upon his youthful face was that of anger rather than fear.

When right at Thrasaric's side, Laurus grasped the rope that bound together the fugitive's hands; there was a violent jerk—the Moor fell. Victor seized him by the arm. "The thousand sesterces are ours!" cried Laurus, and drew the rope towards him.

"No!" exclaimed Thrasaric, and, tearing the short sword from his belt, he severed the cord at a stroke. "Flee, Moor!"

In an instant the latter was on his feet. He cast a grateful look at the Vandal and then darted out among the horses.

"Ah, my horse! The black stallion!" cried Modigisel.

But the Moor was already on the back of the noble animal. A word in his ear—a leap, right out into the crowd, which scattered and made way for them, and horse and rider were dashing at full speed along the road towards Numidia. It seemed but a moment before they disappeared in the protecting darkness of the night.

"My horse!" grumbled the angry Modigisel. "That costs me the game with the dice."

Thrasaric gazed in astonishment after the black stallion. "God, I thank thee!"- he exclaimed. "I will try to merit this. Come, my little one! To the king! He seems to need me."

The demonstration of the nobles and their followers against the king had become more and more threatening, but the latter maintained his position unflinchingly.

"We will not allow ourselves to be coerced by you," said Gundomar.

"We will not suffer ourselves to be deprived of the free enjoyment of life," cried Modigisel. "To-morrow, friends,—whether this king is willing or not,—I invite you all. We will meet here again in this arena, under this silken canopy."

"That you will not," the king said quietly, and taking the torch from the hand of the nearest slave, he rose in his stirrups and hurled it with sure aim, over the heads of the crowd, right into the midst of the silken tent, which at once took fire and flamed up in a bright blaze.

"How dare you?" shouted Gundobad. "This building is not yours. It belongs to the Vandal people. How dare you destroy their pleasures, merely because you cannot share them?"

"And why can you not share them?" continued Gundomar, hotly. "Because you are not a true man, not a genuine Vandal."

"A dreamer—no king for a nation of heroes!"

"What mean those sudden fits of trembling that so often seize you?"

"Who knows whether some secret guilt does not oppress you?"

"Who knows whether your courage would not fail, if danger—"

Just then there came from the crowd immedi-

ately in front of the amphitheatre a wild cry of horror, of deadly fright :

“The tiger! The tiger is loose!”

A mad rush to escape followed. In the desperation of their fear a dense mass of men, women, and children plunged forward, encountered other groups of people, and struggled to force their way through them. Many stumbled, fell, and were trodden under foot.

Above, under one of the archways forming the second story of the amphitheatre and directly opposite to the king, crouched the tiger, lashing his sides with his tail, and all ready for a leap. His broken chain still hung from his neck, and his open jaws were twitching in the struggle between ravenous desire and dread of the blazing torches and the throng of people below him.

Hunger at length prevailed over fear. His eager glance had fallen upon one of the race-horses which stood before the amphitheatre. Between him and his prey swarmed a mass of people—the leap was, besides, almost too far—but his voracious craving urged the huge beast on, and with a low cry he gave a fearful spring over the heads of the people towards his chosen victim. But the whole shrieking mass of humanity surged forward in the same direction, the horses shied, and the spring

did not reach its mark. The tiger had lit upon the ground several feet short of the horse, which, breaking from its halter, bounded away.

The tiger never repeats a leap that has failed. Accordingly, Hasdrubal started to sneak off, as if ashamed. But as he drew back his right fore-paw, it fell upon soft, warm, living flesh.

It was a child, a four-year-old girl, in the gay, tinselled attire of the *amorettes*. Some moments before she had been torn from her mother's side and knocked down in the rush. She lay upon her face on the soft turf, the tender, rosy flesh of her neck and shoulders unprotected and exposed. The tiger's claws instinctively fastened on this tempting morsel and clutched the child by the throat—but only for an instant. Then he suddenly bounded back the length of his body, with a howl of rage more terrible than any he had uttered before. This was caused by an adversary who, advancing on foot, dared to dispute with him the prey he had secured. The great beast crouched again for a spring, which, had it succeeded, must have crushed by its force any man to the ground. But before the leap could be made, his opponent stood right before the gaping jaws and had driven between them up to the hilt a Vandal sword, aim-

ing the weapon from below slightly upward, so that its point pierced the vertebræ.

At first the man, carried along by the impetus of the blow, sank down upon the body of the dead tiger, but in an instant he sprang to his feet, stepped back, and lifted from the ground the terrified child.

"Gelimer! Long live King Gelimer! Hail to the hero!" shouted the multitude, even the Romans joining in the acclamations.

"King, you are not injured?" asked Thrasaric.

"No more than the child," replied Gelimer, calmly, as he placed the little one in the arms of its weeping and frightened mother. The woman stooped and kissed the border of the king's white mantle, all stained as it was with the tiger's blood.

Gelimer wiped his bloody sword on the skin of the beast and thrust the weapon into its sheath. Then he stepped back to his horse and stood with his tall form leaning against its shoulder. Even as king he still wore his old helmet with the black vulture's wings—they seemed now to look down threateningly, as if alive—having simply added to it, around the head-piece, Geiseric's dentated crown. As he glanced at those around him, there came over his countenance a look of sorrowful contempt.

A deep silence ensued; for the time words failed even the boldest of the nobles.

Just then the remains of the burning canopy flared up brightly once more and fell crackling into the arena.

XVIII.

THE brothers of the king now rode up at the head of their troop of horsemen. They had been witnesses from a distance, over the heads of the crowd, of the scene that had just taken place. Springing from their horses, they pressed with enthusiasm Gelimer's hands.

"What is the matter, brother?" asked Gibamund. "That is not the mien of a deliverer."

"O brother," sighed Gelimer, "pity me! I am disgusted with my people. And that is hard! hard!"

"Yes, for we have nothing better," said Zaro, earnestly.

"On earth," replied the king, moodily. "But is it not a sin to love this earthly thing so passionately? All that is earthly is vanity. Is it not the same with one's people and fatherland?" And

sunk in gloomy thoughts, he seemed to become oblivious of the scene around him.

"King Gelimer, awake!" cried a warning voice from the crowd.

It was Thrasaric, who had beheld with astonishment the sudden transformation in the king's manner. The giant also had started to attack the tiger, but the king, who had noticed before all the threatened leap, had anticipated him—and still another.

The older of the two strangers had quietly taken a position with his spear poised to throw. "That was a good stroke, Theudigisel," he whispered. "But let us see how the affair ends. This king is losing his best opportunity."

And so it seemed. For in the mean time the nobles had partly recovered from their confusion and feeling of shame. Once more, not so boldly as before, but still defiantly enough, Gundomar stepped forward and said: "You are a hero, king. It was unjust to doubt it; although it is not easy for us to comprehend you. But we cannot and will not serve even a hero, as our bear-like ancestors obeyed Geiseric."

"It is not necessary and no longer possible," added Modigisel. He began at first to lisp and drawl in his favorite Greek fashion, but soon in

the earnestness of his excitement he quite forgot to keep up the affectation. "We are not now barbarians, as were the companions of the bloody sea-king. We have learned from the Romans to live and to enjoy life. Do not burden us with these heavy weapons. This glorious land is ours without dispute; no one can wrest it from us;—a land where men ought merely to luxuriate, not to work. Here pleasure, and pleasure only, is worth living for. Death, you know, puts an end to all things. Therefore while I still live, I will not fight, but kiss and drink and—"

"Become Justinian's slave," interrupted the king, indignantly.

"Pshaw! These Greeks will never dare to attack us."

"Let them come! With one fierce charge we will run them into the sea."

"If the realm were really in danger, the Gundings know that honor calls them to the front in every Vandal battle."

"But no war threatens from any quarter."

"There is no one rash enough to provoke a quarrel with us."

"It simply suits the Asdings to order about the noblest of the Vandals like Moorish mercenaries or unresisting slaves."

“No longer will we—”

Modigisel did not complete his speech, for the blast of a horn and the noise of approaching horsemen drew attention from his words. A white figure, mounted upon a black courser, came rapidly galloping up, followed by several attendants.

Two torch-bearers rode beside her on the right and on the left, but were hardly able to keep pace with her. Her long light-golden hair streamed behind in the wind; a white mantle, falling in broad folds, fluttered about the rider and her horse.

“That is Hilda!” exclaimed Gibamund.

“Yes, Hilda and war!” was the jubilant reply, as the panting steed came to a stand. Her eyes flashed; in her right hand she waved a parchment. War, king of the Vandals! And I—I am the first to announce to you the fateful word which summons all you Asdings, like the blast of a war-horn, to victory and honor.”

“She is glorious!” said Thrasaric to Eugenia, who nodded assent. “A mantle!” he continued, looking around. “She—Hilda—shall not see me in this despicable state. Lend me your mantle, friend Marcomer.” And stripping off the panther’s skin and flinging away the thyrsus, he threw

around his bare shoulders the brown mantle belonging to the leader of the horsemen.

"How comes it that you—a woman—bring such a message?" asked Gelimer, taking the parchment from her hand.

She sprang from her horse into her husband's arms, and said: "Verus sends me. Ships, with despatches which he was expecting, came into the harbor. He intended to bring this document to you himself—it was the first which he received; but immediately afterwards several other important letters arrived, among them one from the king the of Visigoths, and Verus had to translate them from the cipher in which they were written. Therefore he ordered that I should be wakened. 'To waken Hilda—that means to awaken war,' my ancestor Hildebrand taught me," she concluded with a laugh, but with flashing eyes.

"And truly like the leader of the Valkyrias she came riding among us," said Thrasaric, more to himself than to Eugenia.

"Of that, however, Verus knows nothing," continued Hilda. "But there was a peculiar smile on his lips as he said: 'You are the proper bearer of this message to Gelimer.' I did not delay. I bring you war and—I feel it, king of the Vandals—an assured victory. Read!"

Gelimer unfolded the parchment, the seals of which were already broken, and, beckoning to him a torch-bearer, read in a loud voice :

"To Gelimer, who calls himself King of the Vandals—"

"Who is the insolent writer?" interrupted Zaro.

"Goda, formerly Governor, now King of Sardinia."

"Goda? The wretch! I never trusted him," cried Zaro.

Since under false accusations you have dethroned and imprisoned King Hilderic, I renounce allegiance to you, usurper. You credulous fools forgot that I am an Ostrogoth, but I have never forgotten it. Almost the only one who escaped when my comrades were massacred, I have since plotted incessantly for revenge. In blind confidence you appointed me to rule over this island; now I have won over the Sardinians to my support, and I will henceforth rule them as their king. If you dare to attack me, know that I have appealed to the protection of the great Emperor Justinian, and he has promised to extend it to me. Far rather will I be the subject of a powerful emperor than of a Vandal tyrant.

"GODA, KING OF SARDINIA."

"Yes, that is war," said Gelimer in an earnest voice. "Certainly with Sardinia; probably also with Byzantium, although the last letters from there spoke only of peace. Have you heard it?" and he turned with kingly majesty toward the nobles—"Have you heard it, you nobles, and you, people of the Vandals? Shall I write to the rebel and to the emperor: 'Take and keep what you wish. The descendants of Geiseric object to the weight of weapons and armor'? Will you now continue your festivities in the circus, or do you want—"

"We want war! war!" shouted Thrasaric, breaking his way through the ranks of the nobles. "King Gelimer, your deed, your words, the sight of this glorious woman, the insolent letter of that bold traitor, have roused again in me—and surely in us all—the feelings which too long have slumbered. And as I cast away the unmanly decoration of these roses"—here he tore the garland from his head and threw it to the ground—"so I fling from me all base frivolity and wantonness. Pardon me, my king, far-sighted hero! I will atone—believe me!—for what I have been guilty of; I will atone for it on the field of battle."

Stretching out his hands, he was about to sink upon his knees, but the king caught him and drew him to his breast: "Thanks, noble Thrasaric!

Your ancestor, the hero Thrasafrid, who even now looks down from heaven upon us, will be rejoiced at this."

But Thrasaric tore himself away and, turning to the nobles, cried: "Not only myself, but all who stand around us here I must win back to duty and to heroism. Would that my brother were with us! Comrades, cousins, hear me! Will you, like myself, stand by this valiant king? Will you obey him? Will you follow him to the war, faithful even unto death?"

"We will! We will! To war and unto death!" cried the nobles to a man. Modigisel shouted louder even than the others. Only Gundomar hesitated an instant, but then stepped forward proudly and spoke: "I did not believe in the war. I considered it merely a pretext devised by a too rigorous king to deprive us of our amusements, and to force us to a life of military discipline. But the insolence of this Goda and the help promised him by the perfidious emperor are affronts we cannot brook. Now really there comes a struggle in which our kingdom is at stake. At such a time the Gundings range themselves side by side with the Asdings—now, as heretofore and always. King Gelimer, you are right; I was a fool. Pardon me!"

"Pardon us all!" cried the nobles, excitedly pressing around the king.

Gelimer, deeply moved, extended his hands towards them, which they enthusiastically grasped.

"O Hilda," spoke Thrasaric, "you were awakened in the very nick of time; for this, in great part, is your work." And before Hilda could reply, he drew forward the shy Eugenia from the myrtle bush behind which she had hidden herself. "Do you recognize this little one, my king? Well, then, I have won her for my wife—not by violence! She herself confesses that—that she likes me. It is hard to believe, isn't it? But she says so herself. The priest has blessed our union; now do you also give us to each other in marriage, according to the old kingly custom."

The king smiled upon the bride. "May this marriage be a symbol of the reconciliation of the union of both peoples! I will—"

A moment before, a woman had pressed forward hurriedly to Eugenia's side. Her purple mantle shone in the red glare of the torches. Bending over, she whispered some words in the ear of the young bride.

Eugenia turned pale. Then the whisper ceased, and the woman pointed with outstretched

arm to the Numidian highway, on which the black stallion had disappeared.

"Oh, then—" groaned the bride, interrupting the words of the king. She turned hurriedly away from Thrasaric, but her feet refused to support her, and she sank swooning to the ground.

Soft arms raised her. They were those of Hilda, the war-related Valkyr. With her left hand she drew the tender form to her breast, with her right she motioned back Thrasaric, who in consternation endeavored to clasp the hand of his bride.

"Back!" said Hilda, firmly. "Back from her! Whatever it be that has caused the head of this lily to droop, she shall first raise it again on my breast and under my protection. It was a wrong—a scarcely pardonable one—to celebrate your marriage with such a bride as Eugenia here, in this Grove of Venus. Decide yourself, Thrasaric: are you worthy—now, at this moment—to lead your bride with you to your house?"

A tremor seized the powerful form of the giant; his broad chest heaved, he struggled for breath, then, sighing deeply, he shook his head, and hid his face in the folds of his mantle.

"Eugenia remains with me," said Hilda, sol-

emly, and pressed a kiss upon the pale brow of the now recovering girl. Thrasaric glanced towards her once more and then vanished in the crowd.

Modigisel strode angrily up to Astarte. "Snake!" he cried, and there was no affectation now in his tones, "demon! What did you whisper in the ear of that poor girl?"

"The truth."

"No! He never really meant it—he was not in earnest. Besides, the black stallion has gone to the devil! My game is up."

"But not mine."

"You shall go no further. I am ashamed of this disgraceful business."

"I am not," said she, with a short laugh, looking after Thrasaric.

"Obey me, slave, or—"

He lifted his arm to strike. Once more she threw her head back, this time so violently that her luxuriant black hair loosed itself from its golden bands and fell in a mass down over her shapely white neck; at the same time she pressed her eyes tightly together and distinctly ground her teeth.

As before there was something about this threatening creature which he did not dare to

defy. His uplifted hand fell, and he merely said:

“Only wait! When we are at home—”

“We shall become reconciled to each other,” she said, a smile on her lips, but with a defiant flash from her dark eyes. It was open mockery. She inspired him with horror. He shuddered, as if in fear.

“My brother and king,” said Zaro, incapable of longer restraining his impatience, “Grant me the pleasure of punishing this Goda. The fleet lies ready to sail. Give me only five thousand men, to be selected by myself—”

“We Gundings will go with you,” cried Gundemar.

“And I promise that in one battle I will force Sardinia back to obedience and bring you the traitor’s head.”

Gelimer deliberated. “To send away just now the entire fleet and the flower of the infantry? Now—when at any moment the emperor may attack us here in our own land? That must be carefully considered. I will see Verus—”

“Verus?” cried Hilda, eagerly. “I forgot to tell you. Verus commissioned me to say that he advises that this first spark of rebellion should be stamped out at once. ‘I send you, Hilda,’ said

he, with a peculiar smile, 'for I know that you will urge them to prompt expedition.' You, O king, ought, even before you return to the Capitol, to equip the fleet in the harbor for sailing and to send it under Zaro to Sardinia."

"It is already equipped," said Zaro, proudly. "For the past three days it has been ready to sail against the Byzantines. But the nearest enemy is the best. Give the command, O king!"

"What Verus advises is well advised," said the king, earnestly. "Zaro, your wish is granted."

"On board, then! To sea! To battle!" shouted Zaro, exultingly. "Follow me, Vandals! Man once again the fame-crowned ships! The blue waves of the sea were ever our chosen fighting-ground. Do you not feel the breath of the morning breeze, as it comes from the south-south-east? It is the very wind we want to bear us to Sardinia."

"It is the god who presides over human wishes," cried Hilda, "that hovers yonder in the wind and directs it. He sends it to you, descendants of Geiseric. Follow its breath. For it is the breath of victory that swells your sails. Forward to battle!"

"Forward to battle! To sea! To sea! To Sardinia!" were the shouts that came from a thou-

sand throats. In wild excitement and full of martial enthusiasm the Vandals poured forth from the Grove of Venus towards Carthage and the harbor.

The Romans gazed after them in astonishment, for the existing generation had never before seen such a demonstration on the part of their effeminated masters. The two friends also came forward out of the thick laurel-bush from which, themselves unnoticed, they had attentively observed the last proceedings.

"What do you say now, my lord?" asked the younger. "Have you not changed your mind?"

"No."

"How? and yet you saw—" he pointed to the dead tiger.

"I saw it. I heard also the war-cry of the people. I am sorry for the brave king and his house. Let us to our boat! The Vandals are lost."

XIX.

BEFORE the close of the following day, the fleet had sailed from Carthage. So thoroughly had it been equipped under Zaro's supervision that all

that remained to be done was to select and embark the troops required for the expedition.

Before the sun set, the last sail had disappeared from sight. In the evening, Gelimer, Gibamund, Hilda, and the Chancellor Verus were gathered in council in the royal palace, in the hall of arms, whose high round-arched windows afforded a view far out upon the sea.

Gelimer stood beside a marble table strewn with letters and papers, his head slightly bent, an earnest, anxious look upon his noble countenance.

"You have requested me to listen, in Gibamund's presence, friend Verus, to important news which has reached you within the few hours since Zaro left us. From your appearance I judge it must be a serious matter. Well, begin—I am prepared for anything. I have the strength."

"You will need it," said the priest, almost rudely. "Is Hilda also to remain?"

"Let me stay, O king," said she, clinging to her husband. "I am a woman, but I can be silent. And I wish to know and to share your danger."

Gelimer pressed her hand. "Remain, then, brave sister-in-law; and bear with us what is decreed by the stern Judge in heaven."

"It does, indeed, seem," began Verus, "as if the anger of Heaven pursued you, King Gelimer."

The king started; he closed his eyes, and a look of irrepressible suffering came over his countenance.

"Chancellor," exclaimed Gibamund, indignantly, "no more of such talk. Your words, are daggers which you keep thrusting into the soul of this most noble man. I sometimes think that you torture him purposely; that, for reasons of your own, you foster his morbid fancies."

"Silence, Gibamund," said the king with a groan. "This is no morbid fancy. It is the fearful truth which religion, conscience, and history alike teach us: sin will be punished. When Verus became my chancellor, he remained also my confessor. Who has a better right or a more imperative duty than he to probe my conscience and to crush the arrogant strength of my soul by reminding me of God's anger?"

"But you need your strength, King of the Vandals," cried the angry Hilda, with flashing eyes. "You do not want it crushed."

Gelimer waved his hand, and Verus resumed: "It is, indeed, disheartening. Blow upon blow came the evil tidings as soon as the fleet had left the harbor, as soon as the last sail had vanished

from our sight. First from the Visigoths. At the same time with the news from Sardinia there was received a long letter from King Theudis. It was sent from Hispalis and repeated at length that he must carefully consider the whole matter and must satisfy himself what we can accomplish in war."

"Satisfy himself in Hispalis!" muttered Gibamund.

Verus continued: "Soon after our fleet had departed, an unknown man left this writing at the palace. It reads:

"*To King Gelimer from King Theudis.*

"*'I write this in the port of Carthage—'*"

"How? Impossible!" cried the three hearers.

"*—which I am just leaving. I wished with my own eyes to study the true state of affairs. For three days I have been here, unrecognized. Theudigisel alone, my valiant general, accompanied me on the fishing-boat which brought me across the narrow bay from Kalpe, and which is taking me back again when you are reading this letter, Gelimer. You, yourself, are a king and a hero—I saw you last night when you slew the tiger. But you will not slay the serpent of degeneracy which has coiled itself around your people. It is true I saw their enthusiasm at last flame forth—it is a*

fire of straw. Even if they seriously should desire to reform, they cannot cure in a few weeks the disease which has been growing upon them for two generations. The punishment, the retribution for our vices cannot be averted.'" The king sighed deeply. "*Woe to him who joins his fate to your sinking nation! I offer you, therefore, not alliance, but a refuge. If, after the battle you will lose, you can escape to Spain—and for this I will gladly stretch forth my hand to help you—neither Justinian nor Belisarius will be able to reach you. Farewell.'"*

"An excuse for cowardice," said Gibamund, hotly.

"The man is no coward," sighed Gelimer. "He is prudent. It seems that we must fight alone."

"We will invite this prudent King Theudis to be our guest here in this very hall at the celebration of our victory," cried Hilda.

"Do not defy Heaven with empty boasting," said Gelimer, warningly. "We must manage as best we can without the Visigoths. Valuable as their help would be to us, it is far more important that the Ostrogoths shall at least remain neutral, that Sicily—"

"If it comes to war," interrupted Verus, "Sicily

will be the bridge over which our enemies will pass into Africa."

The king's eyes opened wide with astonishment. Gibamund sprang from his seat, and Hilda, turning pale, exclaimed: "How? My own people? The daughter of the Amelungs?"

"This letter has just been received from the queen-regent. It is the composition of Cassiodorus. I should have recognized it by his erudite style, had he not mentioned himself as its author. She writes that, unable herself to avenge the blood of her father's sister and of many thousand **Goths**, she will rejoice to see the vengeance of **Heaven** carried into effect by her friend, the **Emperor of Byzantium**."

"The vengeance of Heaven! Retribution!" repeated Gelimer, gloomily. "All things conspire to bring it upon us."

"How?" burst forth Gibamund, fiercely. "Has the learned Cassiodorus grown childish? The intriguing Justinian God's avenging angel? And that she-devil, whose name I cannot even mention in the presence of my wife? This pair the avengers of God?"

"That proves nothing," replied Gelimer. "The fathers of the church inform us that God often

employs base, sinful men as the instruments of his wrath."

"Wisely said," spoke the priest with a nod of assent.

Gibamund continued excitedly: "But I cannot believe it. Let me see." And he took the letter from the hand of the chancellor and glanced through it. "Sicily shall be open to the Byzantines—Justinian her only true friend. Her protector and gracious defender!"

"Ah!" exclaimed Hilda, sorrowfully, "did the daughter of the great Theodoric write that?"

"But," Gibamund proceeded in surprise, "that about the vengeance of Heaven is not here at all—not a word of it."

"Not expressly stated, but clearly implied," said Verus, taking back the letter and concealing it in the folds of his robe.

The king had not noticed this incident. With faltering steps he paced up and down the broad hall, muttering to himself. At length he again approached the table.

"Go on," he said with a wearied air. "We have, doubtless, not yet reached the end. But the end is coming," he added in a voice inaudible to the others.

"The messenger is back, O king, whom you

despatched to Tripolis to bring Pudentius hither for trial."

"Since when?"

"An hour ago."

"Without Pudentius?"

"He refuses to come."

"What? I gave my envoy a hundred horsemen to bring the traitor here by force if necessary."

"They were greeted with a shower of darts from the wall. Pudentius had closed the gates and armed the citizens. The city, with all the adjacent district, has openly revolted. They are evidently counting on help from Byzantium. Pudentius called down from the battlements to your messenger: 'Now Nemesis has broken loose to take vengeance upon the bloody Vandals.'"

The king instinctively made a movement as if to ward off some unseen power that threatened him.

"Nemesis!" cried Gibamund. "She shall indeed break loose against—the traitor. But while such danger threatens us at our own doors, in Africa itself, we send away our best defence, the fleet, and also the flower of our army and the heroic Zaro, to distant Sardinia. Why did you counsel such folly, Verus?"

"Am I omniscient?" replied the priest, shrugging his shoulders. "It was only an hour ago the messengers came back from Tripolis."

"O brother," urged Gibamund, "give me two thousand men—give me only a thousand horse, and I will sweep like a tornado upon Tripolis and show this faithless Roman how Nemesis looks under a Vandal helmet."

"Not until Zaro is back," replied the king, with decision. "We must not further divide our strength. Zaro, too, must return—at once! It was a mistake to send him away. I wonder I did not see it. But *your* advice, Verus—no, I mean no reproach. Let a swift ship sail at once to order back the fleet."

"Too late, O king," said Gibamund from the window to which he had hastened. "The wind has changed since we came here. It blows no longer from the southeast, but strongly from the north. The favoring wind has given the fleet so great a start that no ship can now overtake it."

"O God!" sighed the king, "even thy winds are battling against us. But," and the look of care on his brow lifted for a moment, "perhaps we are altogether wrong in fancying the danger so pressing. Byzantium may, indeed, send some help to Sar-

dinia, but whether Justinian will really venture to attack us here in our own land—”

“My earnest wish is that he may try it!” exclaimed Gibamund.

Just then a priest—a deacon from the basilica—entered hurriedly and handed his superior a sealed document.

“This letter, Your Reverence,” he said, “has this moment arrived, brought by a special galley from Byzantium.” And with a respectful salutation he withdrew.

At the first glance at the fastening of the papyrus Verus gave a violent start. Such an action on the part of a man who habitually exercised an almost superhuman control over his feelings could not fail to make a profound impression upon all who were present.

“What new calamity?” cried in dismay even the courageous Hilda.

“It is the sign agreed upon,” said Verus, now regarding the letter with such cold indifference that the transition from violent emotion to such composure might well have awakened fresh surprise.

All waited with impatience while Verus cut the brownish-red cords with a dagger which he drew from the folds of his mantle. The strings, to-

gether with the little wax seal which had held them together, fell down upon the floor. Verus cast a glance over the writing and handed it at once, without comment, to Gelimer. The king read: "‘You are about to receive a visit. The grain-ship has sailed for Africa. The Persian merchant has charge of it.’"

"It was so arranged with my spy in Byzantium. A brownish-red string signifies, war is certain; ‘visit’ denotes invasion; ‘grain-ship’ is the Byzantine fleet; the Persian merchant—Belisarius."

"That sounds like a war-blast!" exclaimed Hilda.

"Welcome, Belisarius!" cried Gibamund, laying his hand on his sword.

The king threw the letter on the table. The look on his face was serious, but calm. "Had this letter been in my hands a day, even a few hours, sooner," he said, "all would have been different. Still, I thank you, Verus, that you have obtained this intelligence even to-day."

A scarcely perceptible smile—was it pride or flattered vanity?—flitted over the thin, bloodless lips of the priest. "I had formerly friendly relations with certain parties in Byzantium. Since this danger threatened I have cultivated them more diligently than ever."

"Well," spoke the king, "let them come. The decision, the certainty, will be a relief to me after the long and anxious waiting. Now there is work to be done—warlike work. That always benefits me—it keeps me from thinking from brooding."

"Yes, let them come," said Gibamund. "They enter our land as robbers, and as robbers they will be driven off. Why should the emperor concern himself about the succession to the Vandal throne? The right is upon our side, and God will give us the victory."

"Yes, the right is upon our side," repeated the king earnestly. "That is my best, my only hope. God protects the right and punishes the wrong. Therefore he will aid us."

This laical assumption of being in the right, this intrepid confidence, did not seem altogether to please the priest. With furrowed brow and fixing his eyes threateningly on Gelimer, he said in a keen, penetrating voice: "Right? Who is right in the sight of God? The Lord finds sin where we ourselves can see none. And he punishes not only the present—"

At these words the king relapsed into his former moodiness, and his eyes lost their bright look of resolve. But Verus was not able to finish. He

was interrupted by the noise of voices quarrelling in the passage-way that led to the hall.

XX.

"I RECOGNIZE the voice," declared Gelimer, turning anxiously towards the curtain which overhung the entrance.

"Yes, it is our boy," said Gibamund. "He seems to be very angry."

A moment later Ammata came rushing in, dragging after him, in spite of all resistance, a handsomely-dressed boy considerably older than himself. One hand of the young Vandal was fastened in the short black hair, the other clutched at the throat the tunic of his opponent, whose dark eyes, short, round head, and sharply-cut features testified to his Roman origin.

"What now, Ammata? What is the trouble, Publius Pudentius?"

"No! no! I will not let you go!" cried Ammata. "You shall repeat it before the king! And the king shall punish you for lying. Listen, brother. We were playing in the outer hall. We had a wrestling-match, and I threw him. He got up and angrily protested: 'That does not count. The devil helped you, the demon of your

race. 'Who?' I asked. 'Well, Geiseric, that son of Orcus. You Asdings boast that you are descended from the heathen gods; but these are, as our deacon teaches us, demons. Hence his fortune, his victory. I laughed, but he continued: 'He acknowledged it himself. When Geiseric once sailed from the harbor of Carthage on a pirate-ship, and the helmsman asked him whither he should turn the bow, the wicked tyrant answered: "Leave it to the wind and the waves; they will bear us against the people with whom God is angry."' Is that true, brother?"

"Yes, it is true," broke in the young Roman; "and it is also true that Geiseric was as inhuman as a demon towards defenceless captives. Enraged at a destructive storm off Tænarum, he landed on the island of Zacynthus, carried on board his vessels five hundred men and women as prisoners, and, when out at sea, had the whole five hundred chopped into pieces, beginning at their feet, and the pieces cast into the sea."

"Brother, that is surely not true!" exclaimed Ammata in great excitement. "What? You are silent? You turn away! You cannot—"

"No, he cannot deny it," cried Pudentius, defiantly. "Do you see how pale he is? Geiseric was a devil, Your whole race is sprung from hell,

The cruelty with which he and his successors treated us Romans, us Catholics, was monstrous! But only wait! As surely as there is a God in heaven, it will not remain unpunished. You have inherited his curse. How is it written in the Scriptures? 'I will visit the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation.'"

A low groan burst from the king. He staggered, sank down upon the couch, and concealed his face in the folds of his purple mantle.

Ammata gazed at him in consternation. Hilda pushed Ammata and the young Roman quickly to one side, and motioned to them to leave the room.

"Go!" she whispered. "Make up your quarrel; you must be reconciled to each other. These things do not concern you boys. Make it up, I say."

Good-naturedly Ammata held out his hand. The Roman took it, but hesitatingly and unwillingly.

"Just see," said Ammata, stooping down, "what luck! And he picked up from the floor the piece of brownish-red cord to which the little wax seal was attached.

"That's so," said Pudentius with surprise. "It

is the very seal which Verus refused to give us for our collection of seals and impressions."

"What a peculiar one it is! A scorpion surrounded by flames."

"Last week when I saw the letter lying open on his table, the seal and the string beside it, how I begged for it!"

"He rapped me over the fingers when I reached out to take it."

"I thought then it must be very valuable."

"And now we find it thrown away, on the floor."

"He could just as well have given it to us then, after he had opened the letter."

"He never knows what it is to have a kindly impulse. He always looks as if he had come straight from the world below."

"Come, let us go."

The boys left the room apparently reconciled; but for how long? No one had overheard their whispered talk.

Gibamund bent over his brother. "Gelimer," said he sorrowfully, "rouse yourself! How can the words of a child—"

"Oh, it is true—all too true. It is the torment of my life. Even the children perceive it and speak of it. On account of the sins of our fathers

the fearful and avenging God inflicts punishment upon us, upon our people, and especially upon the race of Geiseric. We are accursed because of the guilt of our ancestors. On the judgment day our accusers will rise even from the depths of the sea. When the Son of man shall appear in the clouds of the sky and the call shall go forth, 'Earth, open thy depths, and thou O sea, give up thy dead,' then those mangled victims will testify against us."

"Not so; most certainly not!" cried Gibamund. "Verus, do not stand there so cold and silent, with folded arms. You see how your friend, your penitent, is suffering. His soul is in your care—help him! Relieve him from this delusion. Tell him that God is a god of mercy, and that every mortal atones only for his own sins."

But the priest answered sternly: "I cannot speak falsely before the king. Your sentiments, young man, are those of a layman, a German, almost those of a heathen. The king, the matured man, has profited alike by the spiritual teaching of the fathers of the church and the secular wisdom of the philosophers. He is a devout Christian. And he knows that God is a fearful avenger of sin. Gelimer is right, you are wrong."

"Then let me cling to the follies of my youth!" exclaimed Gibamund.

"And me to my heathen gods!" added Hilda. "They, at least, make their worshippers glad-hearted."

"While your pious wisdom makes the king miserable."

"It might even be capable of paralyzing his power—"

"Had he not inherited such glorious strength from those ancestors you revile so bitterly."

"And with it the curse for their sins," muttered Gelimer to himself.

"It is worth while to consider," said Verus, slowly, "whether, in addition to the other captives, we ought not also to cast into prison this Publius Pudentius, the son whom the rebel was not able to take with him in his hasty flight."

"The child? Why?" asked Hilda, reproachfully.

"It was a wise prudence on the part of your kings," proceeded Verus, quietly, "always to keep in their service the sons of distinguished Romans—ostensibly out of respect to their fathers, in reality as hostages for their fidelity."

"Is Gelimer, the good-hearted Gelimer, to punish the innocent son for the guilt of his father,

like your terrible God?" asked Gibamund, indignantly.

"I could never do that," said Gelimer.

"So the traitor thinks," replied Verus. "He relies upon your kindness of heart. Consequently he rebels, although his son is in your hands."

"Set all these boys free. Let them go to their families."

"That would not do. They have seen and heard too much of our preparations—and of our weakness; they are old enough to do us irreparable damage, if they should reveal what they know to our enemies. They must remain in the city, in the palace. But I will leave you now; my work calls me."

"One thing more, Verus. It grieves me that I was unable to wring from Zaro before his departure his consent to that which I have long struggled to obtain from him."

"What do you mean?" asked Hilda.

"I can guess," observed Gibamund. "It concerns the captives in the prison under the citadel. When, in spite of the protest of Zaro and the whole people, Gelimer spared the life of Hilderic and of Euages and changed into imprisonment the punishment of death decreed by the assembly of the people, he was compelled to promise Zaro

never without his consent to set the captives free."

"I wish to release them now, but Zaro has my word, and I could not persuade him."

"He is right," said Verus.

"What? You, the priest, oppose this compassion and pardon?" Hilda asked in astonishment.

"I am also the chancellor of the realm. The former king would be altogether too dangerous, were he at liberty. Romans and Catholics—he is said, you know, secretly to have confessed that faith—might rally around him, and at the court of the emperor the lawful king of the Vandals would be just the weapon sought for against the tyrant Gelimer. It is better that the prisoners remain where they are. Their lives are, of course, secure."

"They have repeatedly demanded a hearing—they wish to justify themselves. This continued solicitation—"

"Their request has always been granted. I myself have examined them."

"What resulted from it?"

"Nothing that I did not already know. Did you not yourself detect the coat-of-mail concealed

under Hilderic's robes, and wrest from his grasp the dagger?"

"Unfortunately, yes. But I mistrust myself so easily. Ambition, the desire for this crown—one of my heaviest sins!—made me only too willing to believe in Hilderic's guilt. And now the captive king, asserting his innocence and appealing to a letter of warning received by him on that very day,—a letter which he maintains will make all clear,—demands that we shall again pass judgment upon him. You have, however, fulfilled his wish, and searched for the letter in the place where they say it was deposited?"

"Certainly," said Verus, calmly, and his impassive features became still more austere. "The letter is a mere invention. When Hilderic repeatedly maintained that he had concealed it in a secret compartment of 'Geiseric's golden cabinet,' I myself, in private, with my own hands carefully searched the entire place. I found, indeed, the secret compartment and opened it, but no such letter was there. Yes, more: upon Hilderic's reiterated entreaties, I even had the cabinet carried to his cell and let him look through it himself, in the presence of witnesses. He also found nothing."

"And no one could previously have abstracted the letter?" asked Gelimer.

"Only you and myself have the keys to the cabinet, which contains our most important documents," replied the priest. "But I must really leave you now. There are important letters which must be written to-night. Fare you well!"

"Thanks, my Verus! May the angel of the Lord watch over me as faithfully in heaven, as you guard me and care for me on earth!"

The priest closed his eyes for a moment, then he nodded his head and said with a slight smile: "That is also *my* prayer."

And with almost noiseless steps he glided from the room.

XXI.

HILDA gazed after him long and thoughtfully. At length with a slight shake of her head she came up to Gelimer and spoke: "O king, do not be angry if I ask you a question which nothing gives me the right to ask except my anxiety for your welfare and the welfare of your house."

"And my love for you, brave-hearted sister-in-law," replied the king, stroking the blond hair

which fell freely over her shoulders, and seating himself upon the couch. "For," he continued with a smile, "even if you are a wicked, arrant heathen and often entertain towards me—I know it well!—a secret grudge, yes, a positive aversion, nevertheless you are very dear to me, you passionate, impulsive creature!"

She let herself sink down at his feet upon a soft, thick cushion covered with a leopard's skin, while Gibamund paced the hall with slow steps, sometimes pausing to glance out through the open window at the sea and the wondrous beauty of the night. The lamps in the room had not been lighted, but the full moon, which a little while before had emerged from the dark waters and had now risen above the walls of the harbor, poured a flood of mellow radiance into the apartment, investing the handsome, noble features of its three occupants with an almost supernatural beauty.

"I will not," she began, "as Zaro and my Gibamund repeatedly have done, until in your anger you forbade it—I will not, you see, warn you in regard to this priest, who—"

"First discovered the plots of Pudentius and the treachery of Hilderic; to whom alone I owe it that I escaped assassination on that eventful

evening; who has saved the kingdom of the Vandals, in spite of all the intrigues against it."

Gibamund checked his steps. "Yes, it is true. I could almost say, unfortunately true. For there is no other man living to whom I so dislike to feel under obligation."

"It is so strikingly true that even our Zaro, who at first accused him bitterly, could scarcely grumble out an objection when I appointed this wise and prudent man one of my councillors, and confided to him, on account of his skill in such matters, the charge of our state-correspondence. And how unweariedly he devotes himself to his work, as priest and chancellor at the same time! I am amazed at the mass of documents he lays before me every morning. I do not believe he sleeps three hours."

"Men who do not sleep and fight and drink and kiss are mysteries to me," laughed Gibamund.

"I do not warn you," said Hilda, "but I ask"—and she laid her hand lightly on the king's arm—"how comes it, how is it possible, that you, the warrior-king of the Vandals, love this gloomy Roman, this apostate, more than all your own family and kinsmen?"

"Now here you are in error, beautiful Hilda," said the king with a smile, caressing her hand,

"Well, yes," she corrected herself, "perhaps you do love Ammata more. He is the one exception."

"My dying father commended this brother—then scarcely more than an infant—to my charge. I took him to my heart and educated him as I would have done my own child." He paused a moment, and then continued: "It is not love that binds me to Verus; what compels me to consider him my protecting angel upon earth, to look up to him with heart-felt thanks, with reverence, with blindly credulous trust, is the confidence, the more than human certainty that—yes"—and here he slightly shuddered—"it is a revelation from God, a miracle."

"A miracle?" repeated Hilda.

"A revelation?" inquired Gibamund, incredulously, stopping beside the two.

"Both," the king replied. "But in order to understand this, you must know more, must learn how my mind and soul were torn by conflicting forces; you must live over with me the time of my transformation, my danger, and my rescue. Yes, and you shall learn these things to-night, my nearest and dearest ones; for who knows when this threatening war will give us another leisure hour?"

“My father once told me that even in my childhood my thoughts seemed scarcely those of a child; that I often fell into a dreamy state, and sometimes asked strange questions. Then came the happy days of my boyhood. Arms, arms, formed the only sport, the only labor, the only study. It was then that I attained that strength and that joy in arms—” Here his eyes flashed in the pale moonlight.

“Which raised you to be the hero of your people,” cried Gibamund.

“But this happy time came to an end. By chance the captain of the hundred who was appointed to the task was taken suddenly sick, and I, the sixteen-year-old boy, received the commission to attend in the prison-yard of this castle the torture of the Romans, the Catholics who refused to abjure their faith. The cries of anguish which penetrated the thick walls had repeatedly driven the Carthaginians to insurrection. Consequently the prison-yard was always guarded. I had, it is true, already heard that such things took place. I was told that they were unavoidable, that the Catholics were all traitors to our kingdom, and that the torture was merely used to force from them a confession of their criminal plans. But I had never witnessed

the proceedings. Now, however, I saw them—I, the sixteen-year-old boy! I myself was the commander of the executioners. Horrible! Horrible! There were about a hundred people, some of them gray-haired women, some of them children scarce as old as I. I ordered the torture stopped. 'It is the king's command,' replied the Arian priests.

"I wished to assist the sufferers. Ah! the entire family of Verus were among the victims. I wished to tear his aged mother from the martyr's stake to which she was bound, to free her from the hissing flames, amid which, in spite of her iron fetters, she writhed and shrieked in unspeakable agony; but my own soldiers held me back. 'By command of the king,' they cried. I struggled fiercely, I foamed at the mouth, I raved—but in vain. I closed my eyes to shut out the horrible sight. But—ah!—"

He stopped and passed his hand over his forehead, but after a moment resumed: "Then my own name, uttered with a shrill shriek, struck upon my ear. Involuntarily I opened my eyes and saw the naked, fettered arm of the old woman stretched out straight towards me. 'Curse you, Gelimer!' she screamed. 'Curse you upon earth and in hell! My curse upon all the Asdings! My curse upon the Vandal people and their kingdom! The wretch

of God shall smite you all, from the child to the gray-bearded man, for your sins and the sins of your fathers. Curse you, Gelimer! Curse you, murderer!’ And her eyes, frightfully distorted by suffering and hate, seemed actually to burn into my own. Then I broke down into a spasm, such as often since has seized me. I was crushed by the thought that, even though I myself were free from guilt, the dying woman in her despair had cursed me and had carried the curse before the throne of God; henceforth I must bear the burden of the sins of my whole race.”

He trembled violently, and the sweat gathered on his brow.

“For God’s sake, brother, stop! Your torments may return again.”

But Gelimer continued: “When I came to myself I was no longer a youth. I had grown old, broken in spirit, demented—whichever you please to call it. I laid aside my sword-belt, my helmet, and my shield, while through my brain, deadening all other thoughts, kept ringing that fearful word ‘sin.’ Its curse, I felt, must rest forever upon myself, my race, my people.

“Well, I sought comfort. I took my Bible. I had been taught that the Bible is God’s oracle. I unrolled, without looking, the Holy Scriptures,

the sharp dagger in my hand, and cried aloud to God on high: 'O Lord, wilt thou really punish me for the sins of my forefathers?' Without looking, I thrust the point of my weapon into the unrolled page. It fell upon the lines: 'For I, the Lord thy God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquities of the parents upon the children even to the third and fourth generation.'

"Again an overmastering horror seized me. But once more I was enabled to regain my self-control, for from the street below came the clear blast of a Vandal cavalry-horn. A troop of horse-men in glittering arms were riding out to join the campaign against the Moors. That was, you know, my delight, my pride. I already had taken part twice in a victorious cavalry-fight. My hope, my courage, my pleasure in life, revived. I thought: Even if my own happiness is forever dead, lo! the Vandal kingdom needs me, and a hero's duty summons me joyously to live, to battle, to die for my people. Is that also nothing? Is that also a sin, empty and vain?"

"Once more I consulted God's word, in another place. I closed the rolls, opened them again, and stuck the point of my dagger into the sentence: 'Vanity of vanities, all is vanity.'

"Then, indeed, I sank into despair. For people

and country and even that very heroism which our ancestors cultivated and celebrated as at once man's highest duty and his noblest joy—all these are vanity, are sins in the sight of God."

"The whole thing was a deplorable mischance," said Gibamund, hotly.

"And it is folly to believe in it," cried Hilda. "O Gelimer, heroic descendant of Geiseric, does not every beat of your heart contradict this fatal delusion?" She sprang up, tossed back her flowing hair, and turned her fiery glance straight upon him.

"Yes, at times, fair chief of the Valkyrias," Gelimer replied with a smile. "And especially since—since God preserved me by a miracle. And fear not, descendant of Hildebrand; you will have no cause to be ashamed of your brother-in-law, the Vandal king, when the trumpets of Belisarius summon us to battle."

"Ah, well for us, my husband," Hilda exclaimed, "that the dominant factor in this man's being is, after all, the hero!" And she joyfully pressed her husband's hand.

"Who can say that he really comprehends the depths of his own nature?" resumed Gelimer. "At that time, and for years afterwards, I lost all desire for heroic deeds, for the glamour and joy-

ous excitement of feats of arms. I grew sick in body as well as in soul. Upon that second warning from the Bible the spasms seized me again, so that my father was forced to yield to my earnest prayers, for he saw that my condition unfitted me for military service. I was permitted to go to the monastery of the monks of our faith in the solitude of the desert. For many years I remained there. It was then that I burned all the martial songs which I had composed in our language for the harp."

"What an act of bigotry!" lamented Hilda.

"But a few of them have been preserved in the memory of our soldiers," said Gibamund, consolingly.

"Noble descendants
Of fathers heroic,
The Asdings of old,
Warrior race
Of Geiseric's blood,
You are the heirs
Of the might of the sea-king."

"And of his fearful sins," added Gelimer, with a lowering brow. For a while he remained silent; then he began afresh:

"Instead of Vandal songs I now composed Latin penitential hymns. In the opinion of the monks the torments of the damned found expres-

sion in my trochees, the fires of hell flashed up in them. And in truth the flames were there; they were the flames of the death-pyre which I had seen devouring living beings. There was no sort of asceticism, no mortification of the flesh, which I did not practise to excess. I hated myself, my sinful soul, my body weighed down by the curse of inherited sin. I fasted, I scourged myself, I wore the penitential girdle until its sharp points tore deep wounds in my flesh. I secretly invented new methods of self-torture when the abbot forbade the further practice of the old. In the mean time I devoured everything in the way of books which the monastery and the libraries of Carthage possessed. I brought it about that my father permitted me to journey to Alexandria, to Athens, to Byzantium, to listen to the teachers there. I was more learned, but not wiser, when I returned from those famous schools to my monastery in the desert. At length I was summoned to my father's death-bed. He commended to me, as a sacred charge, my youngest brother, Ammata. I dared not selfishly hasten from my father's grave back to the monks, as I gladly would have done. My duty towards the child was a human, a healthy one; it restored me to the world. I lived for the sake of this dear brother,"

"No father could have watched over him with more loving care," asserted Gibamund.

"Then I was told I ought to marry. The king, our whole family, wished it. She was of the royal line of the Visigoths, beautiful, noble, and intelligent. She had come to Carthage on a visit. My eyes and my heart alike found her attractive, but I stifled their pleading and answered 'No.'"

"In order to live only for Ammata?" asked Hilda.

"Not solely on that account. The thought came to me"—here his brow again darkened—"that the curse which rests upon me ought not, as threatened in that fearful passage of Scripture, to be propagated from generation to generation. With terror I should recognize in my children the lineaments of their blighted father. Therefore I remained unmarried."

"What a morbid misconception of the truth!" whispered Gibamund to his beautiful wife, as he kissed her and drew her tenderly towards him.

"It was at that time, I believe," scolded Hilda, "that you composed that wicked and cynical hymn which rejects all human love as sinful:

"*Maledictus amor sexus,
Maledicta oscula,
Sint amplexus maledicti,
Inferi ligamina.*"

It is not true at all," she said with a smile, and heartily returned her husband's kiss.

But Gelimer continued: "What the truth is will be revealed to us—on the judgment day. However, my care for the boy healed my own sickness. Once more I applied myself to arms; it was necessary to do so, in order to train my pupil. But still more than by this I was helped by my duty—"

"Towards your people and fatherland," interrupted Hilda.

"Yes," declared Gibamund. "At that time the Moors had proved themselves far more than a match for our effeminated troops and our unwarlike king. We were defeated in every battle and no longer dared to take the open field against the camel-riders. Our border-districts were ravaged year after year, until at length the robbers of the desert, growing bolder, pushed forward into the heart of our territory and made their incursions up to the very gates of Carthage."

"Then it was necessary to become the shield of my people. I did this—did it gladly. The old delight in battle awoke in me, and I said to myself it was no vain, sinful desire for fame that impelled me."

"What? Is heroism to be deemed a sin?" cried

Hilda. "You fought simply to protect your people."

"Yes; but he took a good deal of pleasure in it," said Gibamund, laughingly, to his wife. "And he has often pursued the Moors considerably further into the desert, and slain with his own hand many more of them in the pursuit than the mere protection of Carthage would have required."

"May Heaven pardon all that I did beyond what was necessary!" returned Gelimer with a troubled look. "Often, in the very midst of the fight, the thought, 'This is a sin,' has crippled my arm. And formerly the old melancholy often came over me, together with the torments of penitential fear, the consciousness of guilt, the burden of the curse of the half-burnt woman, and the soul-crushing words: 'All is sin, all is vanity.'"

"Then came that day of fiercest agony, agony scarcely less intense than that endured by those poor Catholics, by the parents and family of Verus. But it brought at the same time the culmination, the deliverance, the saving—by Verus. Yes, as Jesus Christ is my Saviour in heaven, so was this priest my deliverer, my saviour on earth."

"Do not blaspheme!" said Gibamund, reprov-
ingly. "I am, unfortunately, by no means so

pious a Christian as you ; but to compare to the Saviour, even if he merely resembles God, without being himself of the same essence as God—”

“ I see you know by heart your Arian confession of faith, my dear,” Hilda remarked. “ But old Hildebrand’s opinion was that he neither resembles nor is of the same essence as the gods of our ancestors.”

“ No, for they are devils,” Gelimer replied indignantly, and made the sign of the cross.

“ Still, I should not like,” resumed Gibamund, “ to compare this sombre-souled Verus to Christ.”

“ I felt towards him once just as you and Zaro and almost all others feel now. He did not attract, he repelled me. He, he only of all his family—whose martyrdom for their faith he had witnessed—recanted to the executioners. Was this done from fear of death or was it really conviction? I mistrusted him. Besides, the fact that he stood so high in the favor of King Hilderic, the friend of Byzantium, whose plots against my succession to the throne I even at that time conjectured, displeased me. What injustice I did Verus his actions have since proved. For he, and he alone, saved both the Vandal kingdom and myself. Thus he has clearly fulfilled what God’s manifest sign announced to me in the most

terrible hour of my life. Hear what as yet only our Zaro knows; I told it to him as my answer to his warning. You also shall now hear it, and shall recognize God's sign and miracle."

XXII.

"IT was three years ago. We had marched against the Moors, this time towards the south-west, against the tribes which are accustomed to pitch their tents at the base of the Eurasian mountains. We had passed through Numidia and, pressing forward from Tipasa, had driven the enemy from the lowlands up among the steep cliffs. There, amid inaccessible rocks, they sought a refuge. We encamped in the plain, and determined to beleaguer them until hunger should force a surrender. Days, weeks passed. I grew impatient at the delay, and rode out from time to time along the base of the range, in search of some spot where the rocks, rising less abruptly, might afford a chance for a successful assault.

"On one of these solitary rides—I needed no escort, for the enemy did not dare to descend into the plain—I had gone far, very far from our camp. In passing around a jagged shoulder of the mountain, I at length became confused and

uncertain in what direction I was going through the vast and pathless desert.

“However, I had never examined this side of the mountain, and it seemed less difficult of ascent. I did not trouble myself about the way back, although my panting horse left mile after mile behind him ; his hoof-prints in the sand would guide my return to the camp.

“Soon the rays of the sun began to fall more and more obliquely, and a brownish haze gathered around its sinking disk. I decided merely to take a look around the next projecting point and then to retrace my course. Accordingly I rode my horse close up to the rocks, when suddenly an appalling sound burst on my ear—the savage roar of a full-grown lion. My steed gave a wild plunge, and I saw the beast, a monster in size, only a few paces from me, crouching for a spring. With all my strength I hurled my spear. But at the same moment my horse, frantic with terror, reared with such violence that he fell over and buried me under his weight. A sharp pain in my thigh was the last feeling I was conscious of. Then my senses failed me.”

He paused, shuddering even at the recollection of the scene.

"A lion?" said Hilda in a faltering voice. "They generally avoid the desert."

"Yes," replied Gibamund. "But they love to prowl among the mountains on the verge of the desert." I know," he continued, "that you were brought back with a broken leg to Carthage. It was many weeks before you recovered. But I did not know—"

"When I regained my senses the sun was just setting. The heat was intense, alike in the air and in the dry sand on which the back of my head rested, for I had lost my helmet in the fall. The horse was dead; it had broken its neck. Its heavy weight rested upon my right leg, which pained me violently. I attempted to draw it forth from under the body of the horse, but it was impossible. I could not move it. Then, pressing my right hand firmly against the sand, I endeavored to raise my head in order to get a glimpse of my surroundings. I succeeded, and espied, a few paces beyond the dead horse, the lion. He lay motionless upon his belly, his head turned towards me, and the shaft of my spear protruding from his breast, beside his right forepaw. He, too, seemed dead, and my heart gave an exultant throb. But no! As I moved, a low growl came from his half-open jaws. He bristled his

mane ; he sought to rise, but could not. He dug his claws deeper into the sand, evidently striving to drag himself towards me. And I? I could not move an inch. Then there came upon me—I do not deny it—a wretched, cowardly fear. I sank back upon the sand, for I could not endure the fearful glance of his glaring eyes. I thought : ‘Alas! what a fate will be mine!’ I shouted in my despair as loudly as I could : ‘Help! Help!’ But I soon repented this. For my voice served to irritate the wounded beast, and he answered with a roar so fearful that it fairly took away my breath. When he grew still again, the blood was rushing madly through my veins. What a death threatened me! No call for help could be heard by my people, for many, many miles of desert sand separated me from our nearest outposts. Of the enemy upon the mountains I had not seen a trace during my entire ride. How willingly would I have delivered myself into their hands as a captive! But to die here—under this scorching sun, upon this fiery-hot sand—slowly and from thirst!—At the very thought I began to feel its fearful pangs. And I had heard that the torment of this death might be protracted for days.

“I looked up to the leaden-gray, pitiless sky and asked in a whisper—I feared, I confess it, to

rouse the lion again :—‘ Just God, why ? What have I been guilty of, that I must suffer thus ? ’

“ Then the fearful answer of the Holy Book flashed through my mind : ‘ For I, the Lord thy God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquities of the parents upon the children even to the third and fourth generation.’ ‘ You are atoning now,’ I groaned, ‘ for the sins of your ancestors. The curse of the martyred is being fulfilled. It rests upon you on earth, it will rest upon you in hell. And, in fact, is not this already hell that surrounds me, that burns in my eyes, my throat, my breast, and my soul ? ’ And hark ! louder than before, and it seemed to me nearer, sounded the growl of the lion. Then again I became unconscious.

“ So I lay the whole night, passing from the swoon into a feverish and unrefreshing sleep. There I lived over again all that had happened. ‘ Ah,’ I thought with a smile, ‘ this is, of course, only a dream ; it can be nothing but a dream. Such things do not really happen. You are lying in your tent, your sword beside you.’ I awoke, and reached out for it. Oh, horrible ! my hand clutched the sand of the desert ! It was *not* a dream.

“ It was already growing light again. Hot—ah ! fearfully hot were the rays of the sun that fell

upon my unprotected face. Then the thought came ; My sword ! a weapon ! Why should I bear for hour after hour such torment, such death, agony ? No ! I will put an end to it, and may God pardon the sin ! My soul at any rate is lost. I reached for the sword, the empty sheath hung in my belt, but the blade itself was gone. I looked around and saw the trusty weapon lying quite near me. Never had I loved it as I did at that moment ! I put out my hand to take it, to draw it towards me. My heart sank. Stretch my arm and my fingers as much as I was able, they could not reach the sword. It lay too far away—only a few inches, but still beyond my grasp. Here a low whimper reminded me of the lion. With an effort, for my strength now gave out easily, I raised myself so that I could see him.

“ Ah ! Is that an illusion of beginning madness ? The thought swept through my brain, like driving clouds before a storm. No ! it is true. The beast has worked himself nearer, much nearer than yesterday. It is *not* deception. I can remember distinctly that yesterday, when he stretched forth his paw, he could not reach the large, black stone a little beyond the horse, and now the stone lies right beside his flank. In the course of these hours he has dragged himself for-

ward the whole length of his body. He is now not more than two paces from me. If he should work forward still farther—if he should reach me! Without means of defence I must lie here, and let him strip the flesh from my living body. I prayed, I prayed in my anguish to God. ‘No, no, no, my God! You cannot abandon me here. You must save me, God of mercy.’ And then there occurred to me the belief in guardian spirits which pervades our whole people, spirits in human form appointed by God to help us. You remember?”

“Of course,” replied Gibamund. “And through fervent prayer God can even be compelled, in moments of supreme danger, to show us the protecting spirit, to send it to our rescue.”

“My ancestor, too,” observed Hilda, “believed firmly in this. He said that our forefathers regarded the protecting deities as women, who, although invisible, everywhere followed the chosen hero. But since the introduction of Christianity—”

“These demoniac women have departed from us,” Gelimer interrupted, crossing himself, “and the Lord God has appointed men, who, under his direction, are our helpers, advisers, and saviours upon earth. ‘Send me, O God,’ I cried in the fervor of my agony, ‘send me in this hour of my greatest

need the man whom you have given me for my guardian spirit in this world. Let him save me ! And as long as I live I will trust him even as myself, I will honor in him the might of thy miraculous power.'

"When I had uttered this passionate prayer, a profound sense of relief came over me. It is true that weakness, prostrating weakness, rendered me perfectly helpless ; but even in this helplessness I felt a blissful assurance that deliverance was at hand. And now in the delirium of fever I beheld alluring visions of my rescue, while the fearful thirst that tormented me conjured up a glorious spring of water gushing from the rocks near by. And soon, too, my deliverer seemed to come. Not Zaro or Gibamund—I knew well that they had gone against other Moors, far to the west of our camp. No ! It was another—one whose features I could not distinctly see. He sprang down from his whinnying steed, slew the lion, and dragged from my body the crushing weight of the dead horse. Then, for a time, I can recall nothing more but a rushing and ringing in my ears, and a voice that seemed to say : 'The rescuer is here.' Suddenly the ringing noise ceased, and I heard—this time it was *not* delirium !—behind me, in the direction of our camp, the neigh of a horse. With

the expenditure of my last remaining strength, I turned my head, and saw, a few paces from me, a man who had just sprung from his steed, and who, with his hand clutching the hilt of his sword, stood in an attitude of bewilderment and doubt, gazing at me and the lion. Apparently he hesitated."

"He hesitated?" Hilda exclaimed.

"He stopped to consider? A Vandal soldier?"

"He was not a Vandal."

"A Moor? An enemy?"

"It was Verus, the priest. 'My guardian spirit!' I cried, 'my preserver! God has sent you. My whole life—I place it in your hands.' Then once more I sank into unconsciousness.

"Verus told to me afterwards that he approached the lion carefully; but when he saw how deadly a wound the weapon had made, he grasped the spear and quickly drew it out; a gush of blood followed, and the beast fell over dead. Then he released me, lifted me with difficulty upon his horse, and led me slowly back across the desert. My followers had searched for me only upon the paths along which they had previously seen me ride. But Verus, who accompanied our expedition, had noticed that morning that, when beyond the camp, I had turned my course towards

the east. And when I was missed, he searched until he found me."

"Alone?"

"Entirely alone."

"That is strange," said Hilda. "How easily he alone might have failed in his search!"

"God enlightened and guided him."

"And you and he have both kept silent about this?"

"God's miracles are not subjects for idle gossip. With all my heart I begged his pardon for previously mistrusting him. He generously forgave me. 'I felt it,' said he, 'and was grieved at it. Atone for it by henceforth trusting me with implicit confidence. For I tell you honestly, you are right; God did indeed send me to you. I am your fate, the instrument in God's hands that watches over your life and guides it to its destined end. Although awake, I saw you, as in a vision, lying helpless in the desert, and a voice within me spoke: 'Go seek him; you shall become his destiny!' And I could not rest until I found you."

"I have confided all this to you, Hilda and Gibamund, that you may nevermore grieve me with your mistrust of Verus. No, Hilda, do not shake your head. No remonstrance—I will not suffer it. Your doubts embitter my life. Did he not

also a second time save me from death? O ye of little faith, do ye demand still a third sign from God? But I do not wish to anger you, and so I will leave you. Besides, it has grown late. Believe, trust, and—be silent.”

Hilda gazed after him thoughtfully, as he walked away. Then, with a shrug of her shoulders, she said, “It was mere coincidence and superstition. How can a soul so noble become a prey to such delusions?”

“It is precisely such souls that are most threatened by such diseases. For my part, I am thankful for my very ordinary intelligence.”

“And for your healthy soul,” added Hilda, starting up with a sigh of relief, and clasping her arms around her husband’s neck.

XXIII.

EARLY in the morning of the third day after the above conversation, Hilda and her protégée Eugenia sat together, in one of the private apartments of the palace, engaged in confidential talk, but at the same time busily at work.

The high, but narrow, arched windows of the room looked out on the great quadrangular courtyard, which presented a scene of stirring and martial activity.

In one part of the broad space Vandal recruits just arrived in Carthage were being formed into squads of ten and companies of a hundred; in another part a band of newly-enlisted soldiers were shooting arrows and hurling spears at wooden targets, roughly fashioned to resemble Byzantine warriors in full armor; a tolerably long enclosure, fenced off from the rest of the palace-yard, served for the inspection of the horses and camels which Moorish merchants offered for sale. The king, Gibamund, and the Gundings were giving their attention to the various groups as necessity seemed to require.

Hilda sat upon a raised cushion, from which, whenever she glanced up from her work, she was able without trouble to overlook the entire courtyard. And often, in truth, she let the needle rest with which she was working upon a large piece of scarlet cloth, that lay spread out between the two women, covering the knees of both. Then she gave a bright, smiling glance down at the manly form of her husband; and if he caught the look and nodded in return, a soft glow of happiness suffused the cheeks of the young wife.

Hilda noticed that from time to time Eugenia also raised her slender neck and sought to look down into the court. But she sat too close

under the sill of the window to succeed in the attempt, and when, after many trials, she detected Hilda observing her, she blushed deeply with shame and confusion.

"You are now through with the lower edge," said Hilda, kindly. "Put the cushion yonder on the stool. You must sit up higher now—on account of the work."

Eagerly Eugenia obeyed, and her eyes swept hurriedly in a stolen glance over the yard below. Then the long lashes sank in disappointment, and quicker than before she plied the needle and the golden thread through the scarlet cloth.

"Soon," remarked Hilda, "new companies will take their turn. Then other leaders will probably come into the court-yard."

Eugenia said nothing, but the look of sadness faded from her countenance.

"You have been so industrious," continued Hilda, "that we have almost finished. Before the sun sets, Geiseric's old war-banner will float once more over the roof of the palace. The golden dragon looks quite fierce in his new embroidery."

"Only one wing is a little unravelled, and his claws—"

"No wonder they have become somewhat

blunt," laughed Hilda, "during the long years of peace, while the banner lay idle in the armory."

"There was plenty of fighting against the Moors."

"Yes; but for the sake of these petty combats Geiseric's old victorious banner was not roused from its proud dreams. Our squadrons carried with them only small cavalry flags, and the venerable war-emblem was not displayed from the palace. But now that we are threatened by the Byzantine Empire, Gelimer, following the old custom, has commanded the great banner to be raised above the roof. Gibamund brought it to me that I might restore the torn and faded embroidery."

"We would have been through with it before now, had you not woven in, half concealed along the edge, those queer little signs—"

"Hush!" whispered Hilda with a smile. "He must know nothing of this."

"Who?"

"The pious king. Ah, we can never understand each other and never get along together!"

"Why must he know nothing about them?"

"They are ancient runes, battle-runes of our people. My grandfather Hildebrand taught them to me. And who knows whether they do not help?"

So saying, she smoothed the work out with her hand, which lingered almost caressingly upon the characters, while she softly sung :

“ ‘ Runes of our race
By our forefathers revered,
Securing success
By your magical might,
Wave in the wind
On the banner
We bear to the battle!
Summon the sisters,
The might-giving maidens,
Valkyrs of victory,
Circling like swans
At the head of our host.
Send us success
And fetter our foes.
Blunt be their sword-blades,
Split their stout spears,
Shattered their shields,
And broken their breastplates!
But unto ours
Send the sure victory,
That on swift steeds
They may follow the flight
Of the fugitive foe.’ ”

“ ‘ There! The old charm has often helped the Amelungs, why should it fail the Asdings? So! Now the dragon can fly again. He has been

moulting," she laughed merrily, "and now his wings have grown anew."

She sprang up, raised the long, heavy, and sharply-pointed pole, to which the scarlet cloth was fastened with gold-headed nails, and with both hands swung the banner above her head. Gibamund and some of the soldiers below caught sight of the waving banner and the beautiful head encircled by its golden hair. "Hail, Hilda, hail!" was their enthusiastic shout.

Startled at the suddenness of this outburst, Hilda sank at once to her knees to withdraw herself from notice. But she had heard *his* voice; therefore she smiled, happy even amid her embarrassment. Indeed her confusion only rendered her more charming. -

Eugenia seemed to feel this. Impulsively she slipped down beside the princess, and covered her hands and beautiful arms with affectionate kisses.

"O Lady, how glorious you are! When your eye flashes so majestically—when you, comparable only to Pallas Athene, speak with such inspiration about battles and heroism—then a feeling of awe, or at least reverence, creeps over me, and holds me from you. But at other times, when, as so often in these recent days, I behold your sweet womanly content, your devoted tenderness, and

how you, a loved and happy wife, love with your whole heart your husband and live for him alone, then, oh, then—do not scold me for my presumption!—I feel myself akin to you, as one related, as—”

“As a sister, my Eugenia,” responded Hilda, pressing the delicate and graceful girl to her bosom. “Believe me, they do not exclude each other—valiant, death-despising heroism, and woman’s tenderest, truest love. I have often argued this subject with the most beautiful woman in the world.”

“And pray who is that?” inquired Eugenia, not without doubt whether any one could possibly be more beautiful than Hilda.

“Mataswintha, the granddaughter of the great Theodoric. She would have become my friend, but she wished to hear only of love, nothing about heroism or duty towards people and father land. She believes that love is the only right and the only duty. That separated us sharply and decidedly. But how touchingly both may blend together is related in an old and beautiful legend. My noble friend Teia sang it to my grandfather and me, to the accompaniment of the harp, as only Teia can sing. I will translate it for you into your language. Come, let us repair the golden

border here at the corner, while I tell you the story."

Both seated themselves again beside the open window, and while the work went on Hilda began :

"It was far, far back in the olden time, in the distant land of Thule, in Scandinavia. There a noble hero, was born, of Volsung blood : he was called Helgi, and had no equal. One day, after a great victory over the Hundings, the ancient enemies of his house, he was resting upon a rock in the fir forest, when a sudden brightness illumined the heavens, and out of the brightness shot flashes of lightning, like fiery spears, and out of the clouds came riding the Valkyrias, those heroic maidens who, according to the beautiful belief of our ancestors, decide the battle and bear aloft the fallen to the shield-adorned halls of Valhalla. In helmet and coat-of-mail they came riding down, and the points of their spears were tipped with flame. And one of them, Sigrun, approached the solitary man upon the rock, took his hand, greeted him, and kissed him beneath the helmet.

"From that time they loved each other devotedly. But Sigrun had been betrothed by her father to another, and Helgi had to fight for his

loved one in desperate battle. And there he slew not only her betrothed, but also her father and all her brothers except one. Sigrun herself, hovering in the clouds, had given him the victory. Then she became his wife, although he had killed her father and brothers.

“ But soon afterwards Helgi himself, her dearly-loved hero, was murdered by the remaining brother, whom he had spared. Her brother, it is true, offered expiation to the widow, but she cursed him, and said : ‘ May the ship that carries you never speed, although a fair wind fills its sails ! May the horse that bears you lose its swiftness when you flee from your enemies ! May the sword you brandish prove harmless to all except yourself ! You shall live as friendless as the wolf in the forest.’ And she rejected all consolation, tore out her hair, and exclaimed : ‘ Woe to the widow who can accept consolation ! She never knew what it is to love—for love is eternal. Woe to the wife who has lost her husband ! Her heart is desolate. Why should she continue to live ? ’ ”

Here Eugenia repeated softly to herself : “ Woe to the widow who can accept consolation ! She never knew what it is to love—for love is eternal. Woe to the wife who has lost her husband ! Her

heart is desolate. Why should she continue to live?"

"'As the ash-tree above thorns and thistles, so towers Helgi above all heroes. For the widow there is only one place left on earth—her husband's grave. And Sigrun will never again find joy in the world, unless his burial-mound should open to the light, and I could again embrace him?'

"And so powerful, so all-compelling is the longing of the faithful-hearted widow, that it breaks even the bands of death. In the evening a maid-servant came running to Sigrun, and spoke: 'Hasten out, if you desire to have your husband again. Lo! the mound has opened, and a light flashes from it. Your longing has brought back the hero. He sits within the mound, and calls for you to stanch his bleeding wounds.'

In a low, quivering voice Eugenia murmured: "The longing of the faithful-hearted widow is so powerful it breaks even the bands of death."

"Sigrun went to the burial-mound to Helgi, dried his wounds, kissed him, and said: 'Your hair is dripping wet; you are covered with blood; your hands are cold and damp. How shall I find a remedy for these things?' 'It is your fault,' he said; 'you have wept so many tears, and every one fell in blood upon Helgi's breast.' Then she cried:

‘I will weep no more; I will rest upon your breast, as I did when you were alive.’ Whereupon Helgi said exultingly: ‘Now you will remain in the grave with me, in the arms of the dead, although yourself alive!’

“But the saga tells that when Sigrun also died, both were born again—he as a victorious hero, she as a Valkyr. Such is the story how woman’s devoted love prevails over death, and, by its all-powerful longing, penetrates even the loved one’s grave.”

“And by its all-powerful longing penetrates even the loved one’s grave,” repeated Eugenia.

Hilda looked up suddenly. “Child, what is the matter with you?” She had been telling her story with so much enthusiasm that towards the end she had paid no attention to her listener. But now she heard a low sobbing, and saw with amazement the young Greek kneeling on the floor, her face buried in her hands, in a vain attempt to conceal her tears.

“Eugenia!”

“O Hilda, it is so beautiful. It must be so blissful to be loved! And it is blissful, too, to love even unto death. O Gibamund’s happy Hilda! O Helgi’s happy Sigrun! How much sorrow and pleasure combined the heart can find

in this story! United in death, if no longer in life, by the magical power of love!"

"O sister! Does this tender heart throb so powerfully, so passionately, so truly, with love? Confide in me. You have not yet said one word—"

"I could not. I felt so much shame both on my own account and—for him. And I dared not speak of my love. For it is, you know, a humiliation and disgrace. For he, my bridegroom—my husband—does not love me."

"Of course he loves you. If not, why would he, whose disposition is so unruly, have wooed you so humbly?"

"Ah! I do not know. I have asked myself the question a hundred times. Until within the last three days I supposed it was from love. And sometimes still my foolish heart half believes it. But no! It was not love. A whim! a pastime! Perhaps"—and she trembled with anger—"a wager! A game he sought to win, that with the winning lost its zest."

"Not so. Thasaric is not capable of that."

"Oh yes! Oh yes!" sobbed Eugenia in despair. "He is capable of it."

"I do not believe it," replied Hilda, and, sink-

ing down beside her friend, she took the heart-broken girl, as if she were a sick child, upon her lap, dried her tear-stained cheeks with the edge of her white mantle, smoothed her rumpled hair, pressed her little head comfortingly to her bosom, and gently rocked her back and forth, while she said in a soothing tone: "It will all come right, Eugenia. It will soon come right. For he loves you—he surely loves you."

"A half-choked sob and a slight shake of the head seemed to answer, "No."

"He surely does. I do not know—nor do I wish to know—what that woman hissed in your ear. But I saw how it affected you—like a poisoned arrow. Whatever it was—"

"I will never, never, never tell!" cried out Eugenia.

"I told you I do not wish to know. Whatever his fault may have been, the Christians have a beautiful saying: 'Love beareth all things; love endureth all things.' "

"Love pardons all things?" whispered Eugenia.

"Of course; but only love. Tell me, my sister, do you really love him?"

The weeping girl tore herself loose, sprang up, stretched forth her arms, and with a cry: "Oh, beyond the power of words to tell!" threw herself

again on the breast of her friend. And now a soft, beautiful light shone through the tears which dimmed her eyes. "See," she said in a low whisper, as if unseen ears might be listening in the room, "that is my own sweet secret—the secret that ought to fill me with shame," she added with a smile. "I loved him long ago. I believe even as a child, when he used to come to my father to sell the grain from his villas, on which occasions he often took me up in his arms, as if I were a feather, until I, at last, refused to permit it. The older I grew, the more I loved him, and the more shyly I avoided him. Ah!—never mention it, as long as you live!—when he seized me upon the public street, fierce as was my indignation, my insulted self-respect, deeply as I sympathized with my poor father's grief; yet—yet—while I struggled desperately in his arms, while I screamed for help—yet, in the midst of all my fright and anger, here in my heart was a sweet, blissful feeling: 'He loves me; it is out of love that he uses this violence towards me.' And I was happy, in fact proud, even in the midst of my wild grief, that he dared commit so bold an outrage purely out of love for me. Can you understand that, can you pardon it?"

"Pardon it? No! For I am both astonished

and delighted. 'It is you who must pardon me, dear Eugenia. I did not consider you capable of such genuine, passionate, womanly love. But, you persistent little hypocrite, why did you so long and so obstinately conceal your true feelings from him and your father and your friend?'

"Why? Surely that is obvious enough," cried Eugenia, almost involuntarily. "From a feeling of disgrace and shame. It is surely a terrible thing when a young girl whom a man has publicly tried to carry off—and even kissed in the attempt—instead of hating him forever, as she ought to do, really loves him with her whole heart. It is, you see, simply abominable."

And half weeping, half laughing, she hid once more her blushing face on Hilda's bosom. As she did so, she kissed tenderly a small gold cross that hung suspended from a silver chain, and passionately pressed to her heart a rune-chased half-circlet of bronze which she wore upon her arm. "His engagement and his marriage gifts," she sighed.

"Yes, you love him devotedly," said Hilda. "And he? He used to send Gibamund to me with many a sorrowful message. He was as thankful as a blind man whose sight has been restored, when I gave him the simple advice that, although

he was, doubtless, utterly unworthy of you, still, if he wished to have you, he should frankly ask whether you were willing to accept him; and then he should propose in due form to your father for your hand. Over this by no means occult wisdom he was as happy as a child. He acted accordingly, and now—”

“And now,” interrupted Eugenia, with a flash of anger that was almost comical, “he has not shown himself for almost three days. Who knows how far off he is?”

“Not very far,” laughed Hilda; “he has just entered the court-yard.”

With the swiftness of an arrow Eugenia’s little head shot up above the window-sill. A half-stifled exclamation of joy burst from her lips; then she slipped down again out of the sight of those below.

“How grand he looks in full armor!” exclaimed Hilda in a voice of joyful surprise. “He wears above his helmet a huge bear’s head with gaping jaws.”

“Indeed? That is the bear he killed himself in the Auras mountains,” whispered Eugenia.

“And how becomingly the bear’s hide falls over his mighty shoulders! He carries a spear, the shaft of which is as thick as a young tree. And

on his shield—what sign is that? A hammer of stone.”

“Yes, yes!” exclaimed the Greek girl, eagerly, as she raised herself up and peeped over the window-sill; “that is the badge of his house. His race is descended, according to the old belief, from a red-bearded, hammer-hurling demon—I do not remember the name.”

A demon?” protested Hilda. “Why, the god Donar is his ancestor, and his descendant of to-day does the god honor. Thrasaric is speaking with Gibamund,” she continued. “They are looking up here—he salutes me. But oh! how pale, how sad as death the poor giant appears!”

“Is that so?” and the little brown head rose once more above the sill.

“Down, Eugenia, down! He must not know that in the matter of longing we cannot hold out as well as he. My husband is motioning to me—he is coming up here. Thrasaric seems to be following.”

Without stopping to reply, Eugenia darted into the adjoining apartment.

XXIV.

HILDA flew to the door to meet her husband, who greeted her with an affectionate embrace.

"You are alone?" asked Gibamund, looking around. "I thought I saw the little antelope beside you at the window."

Hilda pointed in silence to the curtain of the adjoining room. Her husband nodded. "You will soon have a visitor," he said, raising his voice. "Thrasaric desires an interview. He has various matters of importance to say to you."

"He is welcome."

"You have finished the banner?"

"Yes." She grasped the pole, and with her strong arm raised aloft the heavy banner. The scarlet cloth, more than five feet long and two and a half in width, fell down in long folds upon the shoulders of both, as if consecrating them to its service.

Gibamund took the banner from her hand. "I will plant this standard upon our highest battlement, that it may wave from afar a bloody welcome to our enemies. O precious treasure, emblem of the Vandals' fame, Geiseric's victorious banner, never shall you fall into an enemy's hands as long as I live!" he cried enthusiastically. "I

swear it by the head of my loved wife, upon which your folds now rest."

"Never will your eye or mine see that. I swear it like yourself!" spoke Hilda, solemnly; and a slight shudder ran through her as a puff of wind blew the red cloth around her shoulders and against her bosom.

Gibamund kissed her fair forehead, and left the room with the banner. On the threshold he met Thrasaric.

"Welcome, Thrasaric!" Hilda said in a loud voice, upon which the curtain over the door of the neighboring room moved slightly. "I like this. In full armor! It becomes you better than—the other. I hear you have received the command over many thousands; that you are to take Zaro's place until he returns. What do you bring me?"

This friendly, unconstrained address evidently reassured the giant, who had entered the room with a burning face. He cast a searching glance around, in order to detect some trace; but he did not find what he sought.

His whole soul was on fire to speak as quickly as possible about Eugenia, to ask after her, to learn her disposition towards him. But a terrible uncertainty restrained him.

He did not know whether his bride had impart-

ed to her friend his heavy, his inexcusable guilt. He feared so. It was certainly most probable the princess would ask, and why should Eugenia keep silent? Why should she spare him? Had he deserved it? Had not the offended one with good right renounced him forever? All these questions, which he kept propounding to himself the whole time, thronged at once through his poor brain. How deeply he was ashamed of his conduct! Sooner by far would he have set out alone against the whole army of Belisarius than face the reproaches of this noble-souled woman. And yet he had so valiantly imposed upon himself a task still more difficult. As he did not answer, but only breathed hard, Hilda repeated her question: "What do you bring me, Thrasaric?"

He must answer—he perceived that—but Hilda was almost startled as he blurted out in reply, "A horse."

"A horse?" she asked slowly, her voice dwelling on the word. "What am I to do with it?"

Thrasaric was glad to be able to speak, especially about matters so remote from Eugenia. Therefore he answered promptly, "Ride it."

"Well," laughed Hilda, "I suppose I can do that. But to whom does the horse belong?"

"To you. I present it to you. Gibamund has

given his consent. He commands you to receive it from me. Do you understand? He commands it."

"Well, I have not yet refused. In fact, I thank you heartily for the gift. What sort of horse is it?"

"The best in the world," was the instant answer.

"That is Cabaon's black horse, I have heard Gibamund and my brother-in-law say."

"It is true."

"He belongs now to Modigisel."

"No longer."

"Why?"

"Oh! for several reasons. The first, because he belongs at present to you. The third, because the beast was recently stolen away by night from Modigisel. Secondly, Modigisel is dead. Fourthly, the black stallion is mine."

These statements had come so fast, one on top of the other, that Hilda gazed at the speaker without fully understanding him. "Modigisel dead?" she repeated. "Impossible!"

"But, nevertheless, a fact. And, in truth,—except for himself,—no very great misfortune! But to explain: Recently, by night, I helped a young captive Moor to escape. That he would

avail himself of the black stallion, I could not know beforehand. Nevertheless I was delighted—greatly delighted—that he did so. Early this morning another Moor brought the horse into my courtyard. The Moor who had escaped was Sersaon, the great-grandson of Cabaon. Out of gratitude Cabaon sent me the superb steed.”

“But would you not have been compelled to return him to Modigisel?”

“Perhaps. In no event would I have kept the horse. Sooner would I have the devil in my stable than ride upon this accursed beast!”

“Why?”

“Why? Why? You ask me, why?” shouted Thrasaric jubilantly. “You do not, then, know?”

“If I knew, I should not ask you,” replied Hilda quietly.

The effect of these words fairly astounded her. Thrasaric’s huge form sank down on its knees before her, and he pressed her hands so vehemently that she could have cried out with pain.

“That is magnificent! That is divine!” he exclaimed. But in an instant he sprang again to his feet, and his countenance once more clouded over. “Ah!” he said, “this makes it even worse than before. Now I must tell you myself. Pardon me! No, I have not become insane. Wait

just a moment or two. I'll get it out after a while! I commanded that the horse should be taken at once to Modigisel. When my slave came back he brought word that Modigisel is dead."

"It is a fact, then? Yesterday he was in full health. How is it possible?"

"You see, Astarte,—but you know nothing of such creatures!—his freed slave and companion, lived in a house adjoining his. His slaves relate that Modigisel and Astarte, after their return from the Grove of Ve—the Holy Virgin,"—he corrected himself with downcast eyes—"had a fierce quarrel. She did not scream out, she was not violent; but she demanded for the thousandth time her full liberty, for in certain respects Modigisel still reserved control over her. He refused, he scolded, he raged, he is said to have struck her. But yesterday they had apparently become reconciled, for Astarte and the Gundings dined with him. After the meal they all strolled out through the garden. Astarte broke off, before them all, four peaches from a tree. She and the Gundings each ate one, and Modigisel the fourth. As soon as he had eaten it he fell dead at Astarte's feet."

"Horrible! Was it poison?"

"Who can say? The peach grew on the same tree as the others. The Gundings attest the fact,

and their word is not to be doubted. And the Carthaginian is as calm and impenetrable as ever."

"You—you saw her, you spoke with her?"

Thrasaric reddened: "She came to my house—at once—away from the corpse. But I—well, she went away again very quick. She was in haste to take possession of the villa at Decimum, which Modigisel some time ago made over to her."

"What a woman!"

"No woman at all; a monster—but a very beautiful one! So the black stallion remained on my hands. But I—I will not keep the horse. And then it occurred to me that you are the most magnificent of all the women of our people—I mean to say, the best rider. And I thought that, now that war is about to break out, and that you cannot be kept from following Gibamund to the battlefield, if I judge you aright—"

"You do, indeed, judge me aright," laughed Hilda with flashing eyes.

"Therefore I besought Gibamund—and so the horse is yours. Do you see? He is even now being led into the palace-yard."

"A superb animal indeed! I thank you, Thrasaric."

"So be it, then, with the horse," he said gloomily; for now again he did not know how to proceed.

Hilda came to his help. "And your brother?" she inquired.

"Has unfortunately disappeared. I have had him sought for everywhere, in his villas and in my own. Not a trace of him, nor of the beautiful Ionian who—died that night, can be found. It is possible he may have left Carthage by sea. So many ships have sailed recently out of the harbor, some of them, I suppose—" and he became suddenly very pale—"for—for Sicily."

"Yes," Hilda replied with indifference, gazing at the same time out of the window. "The black horse is superb."

"Ah," thought Thrasaric, "she is gone. It is a fact." And with trembling voice he said, while his eye anxiously sought Hilda's: "Several of them, no doubt, were bound for Syracuse?"

She leaned out of the window. "So far as I know, only one," she answered unconcernedly.

"Then it is true!" he cried out in utter despair. "She has gone to her father in Syracuse! She has cast me off for ever! O Eugenia! Eugenia!" And in uncontrollable grief he pressed against the wall his stalwart arm and bowed his head down upon it.

So it happened that he did not see how violently the curtain at the doorway was agitated.

“O princess,” he cried, with an effort regaining his self-command, “it is, I know, but just. I cannot blame you, indeed I rather commend you, because on that wild night you tore her from my arms. Nor can I find fault with her because she thrusts me from her. I know I am not worthy of her. It is my fault—and yet not mine alone. The women, I mean the maidens of our people, are also in part to blame. You seem astonished. But tell me, Hilda, have you ever taken to your heart as a friend a Vandal woman? Eugenia, the Greek, the child of the humble citizen, is nearer and dearer to you than the wives and daughters of our nobles. I will not say—far be it from me!—that the Vandal women are at heart as vile and degenerated as most of our men. Certainly not! But beneath this sky, in the course of three generations, they also have deteriorated. Gold, adornment, trifles, luxury, but gold above all, are the desires of their souls. They long for riches, for immoderate enjoyment, almost as much as the Roman women. Their nature has become indolent. Not one of them understands or shares Hilda’s noble enthusiasm.”

“Yes, they are vain, shallow, and spiritless,” lamented the princess.

“Is it a wonder, then, that our young men do

not seek marriage with these pretentious dolls? Because I am rich, fathers and, still more urgently, obtrusive mothers, and even—well, I will not say that! In short, many a Vandal woman would have been my wife, had I so desired. But I loved none of them. Only this child, this little Grecian girl, touched my heart. And I love her fondly, passionately, from the very depths of my soul—love her with a love that will endure as long as life itself.”

Hilda listened in silence, but her glance stole across the room to the curtained doorway.

“And now—now—I love her more than ever, my pearl that I have lost. She so spares my unworthy self, she so honors the love she once gave me, that she has not even revealed to you my offence, my monstrous crime. But”—here he drew himself up, and a thoroughly noble expression rendered his strong, manly countenance more handsome than ever—“I have imposed upon myself as a penance, in case she has not spoken, to make the confession to you myself. Write that to her; perhaps she will think a little less unkindly of me. It is for me the heaviest of all possible punishments to tell you this; for, Princess Hilda, I honor you as I would a goddess; I honor you as the protecting deity of our people. It is

like death to me that my own words must teach you to despise me. Still you shall know the truth! They say—I do not myself know, but I suppose it is true—that I—for Eugenia—I did it in my drunkenness, after an ocean of wine, but still, I suppose, I did it! And I am not worthy ever to look upon her again! They say—that I—”

“Not you, my husband; it was the wine that did it!” cried a joyous voice, and a slender, girlish form darted across the room, flung herself into Thrasaric’s arms, and clung lovingly to his huge breast. And while her right arm stole around his neck, she pressed the dainty fingers of her left hand upon his lips to stop the humiliating confession.

“Eugenia!” he exclaimed, his face all aglow with surprise and delight, “you have overheard? You can forgive? You love me still?”

“Until death! Even into the grave! Yes, beyond them both! Should I lose you, my soul would find its way to yours, even in its tomb. In life, and in death, Thrasaric, I am yours. For I love you.”

“And love is eternal,” said Hilda, passing her hand caressingly over the young wife’s hair. Then she quietly withdrew from the room, leaving the reunited lovers alone with their happiness.

XXV.

TO CORNELIUS CETHEGUS CÆSARIUS FROM PRO-
COPIUS OF CÆSAREA.

THERE is no longer any reason for concealing my name. The bird would be recognized at any rate by his song. Besides, I am now quite sure that these pages will not be seized in Byzantium, for we shall soon be swimming gayly over the sea.

At last, then, war with the Vandals! The empress has carried her point. She has treated her husband with decided coolness since he withdrew from the undertaking, in fact right contemptuously. That method always works.

What motive has been urging and still urges her to this war Satan, no doubt, fully understands, heaven not very clearly, and I not at all.

Perhaps she thinks the blood of the heretics will wash away another batch of her sins. Or she may hope to get possession of the treasures which, plundered by Geiseric's pirate-ships from all lands, lie heaped up in the Capitol at Carthage; the treasures of the Temple at Jerusalem are among them.

In short she wanted the war, and we have it.

A pious bishop from one of our Asiatic border-cities came to Byzantium—the man's name is

Agathos. The empress invited him to a secret conference. I learn what took place from Antonina, the wife of Belisarius; she was the only other person present. Theodora showed the bishop a letter he had written to the Persian king; upon which the bishop fell in fright to the floor. She touched him with the dainty toe of her golden shoe and said: "Arise, Agathos, man of God, and dream to-night what I now tell you. And if you do not relate this dream to-morrow before noon to the emperor, then I will hand him this letter, and before evening, most holy man, you will be beheaded."

The bishop went away and dreamed what he was commanded, probably without even falling asleep. And on the next day, even before the emperor's morning bath, Agathos had himself announced to Justinian, and in extreme excitement—which, I take it, was not assumed—related to him that Christ had appeared to him in the night in a dream, and had spoken: "Go, O Agathos, to the emperor, and reprove him because, infirm of purpose, he has abandoned his plans to avenge me on the heretics. Say to him: Thus speaks Christ the Lord: Set forth, Justinian, and fear not. For I, the Lord, will assist you in the battle, and will bring Africa and its treasures under your power."

Thereupon Justinian could no longer be held back. The war was at once decided upon. The prefect, prætorian, who opposed it, was removed and cast into prison. From the pulpits of all the basilicas in Byzantium the priests announced the dream of the pious bishop. The soldiers were led by centuries into the churches, where courage was preached into them. Officials proclaimed the dream in the streets, at the harbor, upon the ships. By command of the empress, Megas, her most polished court and personal poet, rendered the dream into Greek and Latin verses.

They are atrociously bad—worse even than those our Megas is accustomed to make; but they can be easily remembered, and so by day and by night the soldiers and sailors shout them out through the streets and in the taverns, just as children sing in the dark to give themselves courage. For it must be confessed that our soldiers do not yet feel altogether comfortable in regard to this holy expedition against Carthage; consequently we all keep singing:

“Christ appeared to the good bishop; sent him to Justinian:

‘Venge thou Christ, Justinianus, on the wicked Arians. Christ himself strikes down the Vandals, subduing for thee Africa.’”

This poem has two advantages: first, that one can, if he pleases, say it over a good many times; second, that it is a matter of entire indifference with which line you begin. The empress says—and she ought to know—that Megas was divinely inspired when he wrote it. In which case the spirit that inspired him left him a little in the lurch with his trochees in the third line—a mishap which not infrequently occurs in verses of some of our uninspired court poets.

We are at work day and night. In the streets of Byzantium you can hear the whinnying of the little, shaggy Hunnish horses. Among these Huns are six hundred excellent archers. Aigan, Bleda, and Bala are the chiefs who lead them. In addition to these there are six hundred Herulians under Fara, a prince of his nation. They are Germans in the pay of Justinian. Only the ‘diamond cuts the diamond,’ says Narses, and ‘German against German’ has long been our favorite game.

Strong detachments of other barbarians also are marching through our streets, barbarians when we call “allies”—that is, we give them gold or grain, and they pay for it in the blood of their sons; among these are Isaurians, Armenians, and others, under leaders of their own race. Of

the people of our empire the Thracians and Illyrians furnish the best soldiers.

In the harbor the ships are rocking in the east wind, impatiently straining at their anchors, their prows turned towards the west, as if longing for the combat.

Gradually the army is being embarked. There are 11,000 infantry and 5000 cavalry, conveyed on five hundred ships with 20,000 sailors. The best battle-ships among these are 102 swift-sailing *dromones* manned with 2000 rowers from Byzantium. The other sailors are Egyptians, Ionians, and Cilicians.

The whole expedition presents a fine and warlike aspect, which, however, I would rather look at than attempt to describe. But the most glorious sight of all is the hero Belisarius surrounded by his chosen body-guard—men armed with shields and long lances, and thoroughly tried in battle.

* * * * *

Already half of our ocean journey lies behind us. I am writing now in the port of Syracuse.

So far all has gone wonderfully well with us. It almost seems as if the goddess you Latins call Fortune fills our sails for us.

Towards the end of June the embarkation was completed. Then the general's ship, which was

to carry Belisarius, was ordered to be brought near the shore, in front of the imperial palace, and Archbishop Epiphanius of Byzantium appeared on board, bringing with him, as the last man to enter the ship, an Arian whom he had just baptized in the Catholic faith. The archbishop blessed the commander's ship, and Belisarius and all of us, even the heathen Huns. Then he descended again into his boat, and amid the acclamations of the multitude our ship got under way, and was followed by the whole fleet. We are all very pious-minded people, whom the empress and her conveniently-dreaming bishop and Justinian are sending to root out the heretics. "It is a holy war; we are fighting for Christ." We have repeated this so often, that at last we believe it ourselves.

Our course lay by way of Perinthus—Heraclea it is called now—to Abydos. There a quarrel broke out among some drunken Huns, and two of them killed a third. Belisarius had both the culprits hanged without delay upon the hill beyond the city.

The Huns, especially the kinsmen of the two who had been executed, became unruly. According to Hunnish law, death is by no means the punishment for murder. My belief is that Hunnish

law permits the heirs of the murdered man to drink at the expense of the murderers until the whole party lie upon the ground helplessly drunk; when they come to their senses they kiss each other, and all is forgotten: for the Huns are more intemperate drinkers than the Germans, and that is saying a good deal. Besides, they had contracted with the emperor only for military service, and he had no right to judge them according to Roman law. Belisarius assembled the Huns around the gallows from which the dead men dangled, surrounded them with his most faithful troops, and roared at them like a lion. I do not suppose they understood his Latin,—to speak precisely, I should say *my* Latin, for it was I who wrote the speech and drilled him in it,—but he pointed from time to time to the men on the gallows, and they understood that. And now they follow us like lambs.

From Abydos our voyage proceeded by way of Sigeum, Taenarum, and Mentone. There a number of our people died. For the commissary of provisions at Byzantium, instead of furnishing hard-baked bread, had the lumps of dough sunk in the water of the public baths (how appetizing! but, to be sure, it cost him nothing), and then browned quickly on the outside in red-hot pans. Prepared

in this way the bread was considerably heavier ; indeed he gained an ounce or two on every pound, and the emperor paid for it by weight. But in a few days this delightful preparation settled down into a mass of stinking paste, and five hundred men died from eating it. The emperor was informed of the matter, but Theodora interceded for the poor commissary, who had to pay her ten times the amount of his profit in return for her Christian mediation, and the man received only an admonition. From Mentone we sailed past Zacynthus to Sicily, where after a voyage of sixteen days we cast anchor in the old and now disused roadstead of Cancana, opposite Mount Ætna.

But now Belisarius began to grow troubled and anxious. By nature he is so eager for fighting that he rushes blindly into it, if an enemy is anywhere pointed out to him. Consequently his impatience and anxiety increased every hour ; for none of the spies, whom he sent out from Byzantium long before his departure, have returned either to the city itself or to any of the prearranged stopping-places on our voyage. Therefore the commander-in-chief knows about as much concerning the Vandals as about the people in the moon.

What sort of men they are, what their plan of

battle will be, how we are to get at them, are thus far insoluble riddles to us. In addition to this, the soldiers have relapsed into their old fear of Geiseric's fleet, and there is no empress on board to induce somebody to dream again. The limping trochees of the poet are seldom sung any more. Our people are not in the mood for singing: if any one inadvertently starts up the tune, two others forthwith fall upon him and cuff him until he desists. Only the Huns and the Heruli—to our disgrace be it said—refrain from open lamentation: they are gloomily silent. But our warriors—the Romans—do not hesitate to proclaim aloud: they would fight valiantly enough on land,—they are used to that,—but if we should be attacked on the open sea, they would compel the sailors to get out of the way as fast as possible with sails and oars: to fight on a rolling, pitching ship with Germans and waves and wind, all at the same time, is not to be expected, and is not stipulated for in the terms of their enlistment. Belisarius, however, is chiefly concerned about his uncertainty with regard to the plans of the enemy. Where is it lurking, this dreaded fleet? Every hour that we hear nothing of it, see nothing of it, renders us more and more uneasy. Does it lie concealed behind one of the neighboring islands?

Does it keep watch, lying in wait for us, on the coast of Africa? If so, where? And where are we to land?

I suggested yesterday that he ought to have considered these matters before. Whereupon he muttered something in his beard and bade me make good the oversight to the best of my ability.

I have come to Syracuse, under the pretext of purchasing supplies from your Ostrogothic rulers, but really to find out about these Vandals all that Belisarius does not know and yet needs to learn.

I have been here since yesterday, and I have asked every one I met about the Vandals. And every one laughs at me and says: "If Belisarius is ignorant, how are we to know? We are not at war with them." And it seems to me the saucy fellows are about right.

XXVI.

TRIUMPH, Cethegus! The old good luck of Belisarius hovers around the pennants at our mast-heads. The gods themselves have blinded the Vandals, have taken away their reason, and must, therefore, wish for their destruction. Hermes clears our path for us and removes all difficulties and dangers from our way.

The fleet of the Vandals, that terror of our valiant soldiers, sails harmlessly off to the north, while with every stitch of canvas set—and merrily the east wind blows us on—we are hurrying from Sicily over the blue waves towards the west, to Carthage.

Our ships cleave the ruffled waters as peacefully as if we were on a festal procession. No enemy, far and wide, to block our course, no spy to watch us, or to announce our approach to our doomed victims, upon whom we shall descend like a meteor falling from a clear sky.

And that all this came to our general's knowledge, that he is able at once to avail himself of the information, is due entirely to Procopius. Or ought I more truthfully to say to blind chance, that capricious goddess, that seems to me—although I am no philosopher—even more than Nemesis, to control the destiny of nations?

I wrote you the last time that I was running about the streets of Syracuse in considerable perplexity, and getting laughed at for my pains when I inquired from the various people I met whether they had seen anything of the Vandals. One of those I questioned, a Gothic naval officer, Totila by name, and as fine-looking as he is haughty, shrugged his shoulders and said "Search

for your enemies yourself. Much rather would I make common cause with the Vandals to seek out your fleet and sink it." While I was still thinking how rightly this young barbarian recognized the true interests of his people and the folly of their queen-regent, and much out of humor with the Goths, with myself, and above all with Belisarius, I turned suddenly the corner of a street and almost ran my nose against a man coming from the opposite direction. It was Hegelochos, my school-companion from Cæsarea, who, I knew, had settled down as a merchant, a grain-speculator, somewhere in Sicily, but in what city I was ignorant.

"What are you seeking here?" he asked after our first greeting.

"I? Oh, merely a trifle," I replied with some vexation, for I heard already in my fancy his mocking laugh. "I am seeking everywhere about a hundred and fifty to two hundred Vandal war-galleys. Do you happen to know where they are?"

"Oh yes, I can tell you," he replied without laughing. "They lie in the harbor of Karalis in Sardinia."

"Omniscient grain-dealer," I cried in unaffected astonishment, "where did you find out that?"

"In Carthage," he replied. "I left that city just three days ago."

And now my questions flew thick and fast. And as often as I pressed my inquiries upon this well-informed and observant man, I obtained from him, as from a sponge, a stream of information most important to us.

Well, then, as far as our fleet is concerned, we have nothing to fear from the Vandals. The barbarians have as yet no suspicion that we are on the way to attack them. The best of their troops have been sent with the dreaded war-ships to Sardinia. Gelimer has made no preparations to defend Carthage or any other city on the coast. He is himself at Hermione, four days' march from the sea. What can he be doing there on the verge of the desert? Consequently, secure from every danger, we can cross the Mediterranean and land in Africa, wherever the wind, the waves, and our own desires bring us.

In the course of this conversation, and while I continued to ply him with questions, I had thrown my arm around my friend's neck. At length I ventured upon the request that he would accompany me to the harbor and take a look at my ship, which lay there at anchor. "It is a swift-sailing vessel," said I, "built upon a new model,

and I think will interest you." The merchant consented. As soon as I had him safe on board, I drew my sword, cut the rope that fastened us to the bronze ring on the pier, and commanded my crew to make for Caucana as quickly as possible.

Hegelochos was frightened, and began to scold and threaten. But I soon pacified him. "Pardon this abduction, my friend," I said, "but it is indispensable that Belisarius himself, and not merely his legal adviser, should speak with you and question you. For he alone knows precisely what is essential to his plans. And I dare not incur the responsibility of having omitted to ask something important or of having misunderstood an answer. Some god who is incensed against the Vandals has sent you here; and woe to me if I do not profit by it! You must give our commander all the information you possess; you must accompany, yes, if need be, pilot our ships to Africa. And this one involuntary journey to Carthage will yield you richer gains from the royal hoard of the Vandals than if you should make a hundred voyages with cargoes of grain. Besides which I will not attempt to reckon the reward which awaits you in heaven for your co-operation in annihilating the heretics." He smiled, his countenance cleared, and finally he broke into a laugh.

But still more joyous was the smile on the face of the hero Belisarius when he saw before him a man "fresh from Carthage," whom he could question to his heart's content. How he praised me—for the accidental meeting! With a peal of the trumpets the command was given to set out. How the wind swells our sails aloft! How gloriously our ships plough their course through the waves! Woe to you, Vandalia! Woe to you, turreted city of Geiseric!

Our course lay past the islands Gaulos and Melita, which separate the Adriatic from the Tyrrhenian sea. Off Melita the wind freshened, as if obedient to the command of Belisarius, into a strong gale from the east, bearing us on the next day to Caput-Bada on the African coast, five days' march from Carthage. I mean five days for a good traveller without baggage; we shall of course require a much longer time. Belisarius commanded the sails to be furled and the fleet to come to anchor; meanwhile all the lieutenants are summoned to the commander's ship to a council of war. The important point to be decided now is, whether we shall disembark the troops and march on Carthage by land or keep them on the ships and make our attack upon the city from the

sea. With respect to this, opinions are greatly at variance.

It is decided: we proceed by land to Carthage. It is true Archelaos, the quæstor, objected that we have no harbor for our ships. A storm might scatter them over the sea or drive them upon the rocks along the coast. He brought forward also the lack of water in the coast-regions and the difficulty of procuring provisions. "If you adopt this plan, I have one request to make," he said bitterly: "that no one will demand from me, as quæstor, anything to eat. A quæstor who has only his office, but no provisions, cannot satisfy your appetite with his official position."

He advised that we should hasten by sea to Carthage and seize the harbor of Stagnum, which is large enough for the entire fleet and at the present time is wholly undefended. From our camp there we could attack the city, which would fall at the first onset, provided the king and his army are really in the interior, four days' march from the coast.

But Belisarius said: "God has fulfilled our most earnest wish; he has permitted us to reach Africa without encountering the hostile fleet. Are we now, all the same, to remain upon the sea and per-

haps still have to contend with those ships before which our people openly threaten to take to flight? So far as regards the storms—better let the vessels go to the bottom empty than with us on board. Now we have the advantage in surprising an unprepared enemy; every delay gives them opportunity to bring their forces into the field. We can disembark here without a battle. Later and in another place we might have to force a landing against both the enemy and the elements. Therefore I say, let us go ashore here. A wall and a ditch around our camp will soon provide us with a place of defence, should we require one. And have no fear about supplies. As soon as we defeat the enemy we can make use of theirs.”

So spoke Belisarius. I considered—as usual—his arguments rather weak, but his courage unbounded. The truth is that he always chooses the nearest road to battle.

The opinion of Belisarius, of course, prevailed, and the council of war was dismissed. Then the horses, arms, baggage, and engines of war were put on shore. About fourteen thousand soldiers and nineteen thousand sailors began to shovel, to dig, and to drive stakes in the hot, dry sand. Only a thousand men were posted as guards, and a thousand sailors remained on the ships. Our

general dug the first spadeful of dirt and also the last, but between the two he continued uninterruptedly at work. Spurred on by his example, all worked so indefatigably that before night the ditch, the wall, and even the empalement were completed around the entire camp. Only five archers passed the night upon each ship.

So far all is well. Our spacious ships still contain abundant supplies of provisions, thanks to the liberality of the Ostrogoths in Sicily. For whatever an army could possibly need for man or horse was furnished in abundance by these blockheads, the disobliging Totila, who does not wish us well, having been at once recalled. By command of the queen-regent the stores were almost presented to us, and to the questions asked by us in our astonishment we received the reply by the order of the learned Cassiodorus: "You repay us because you avenge us on the Vandals."

Well, Justinian will not fail to reward the Ostrogoths, possibly in a way they do not expect. I wonder whether the learned minister knows the fable how man with the aid of the horse pursued and destroyed the stag, which the horse detested. The noble beast took the rider on his back for this one ride, and never afterwards could get rid of him.

Unfortunately our supply of water is getting low. And even the little that we have left is becoming almost too foul for use. Without water for man and beast how shall we be able to march for days under this African sun? This is a matter which threatens to prove serious.

I myself shall soon be compelled to believe that we *are* God's chosen instruments—we, the soldiers of the truthful Justinian and the chaste-hearted Theodora! Or have the people and king of the Vandals so brought upon themselves the anger of Heaven that miracle upon miracle occurs to their detriment and in our favor?

Yesterday evening we were all, from the commander-in-chief down to the humblest camel, in the greatest anxiety about water. Early this morning my slave Agnellus brought amphora after amphora of delicious spring-water to my tent. Not merely enough for drinking, but abundance also for a bath. On the eastern edge of the camp our Heruli, with the last strokes of their spades, struck a large and copiously flowing spring—a thing unheard of before in the province of Byzacium—between the sea and the “desert.” For by this name the people here designate all the land southwest of the great highway along which we

are about to march. The term seems to me decidedly unjust, for a part of the country is very fruitful; however, it is old waste land and often merges almost imperceptibly into the true desert. At all events, this spring gushed out from the dry sand around it, and so bounteously does it pour forth its water that men and beasts can drink and bathe to their hearts' content, while the spoiled water on board the ships can be poured out and replaced with the very best.

I hastened to Belisarius and congratulated him, not merely on account of the real utility of this discovery, but also on account of the augury of success which it brings with it. "Water gushes forth from the desert for you, my general," I cried. "That betokens an easy victory. You are indeed the favorite of Heaven and the wonder of the world." He smiled. I suppose a man is apt to hear such things with complacency.

I am commissioned to draw up a military decree, which is to be read to every division of the army, when it breaks camp.

A score or two of our worthy Huns trotted off into the country and helped themselves to the crops already ripe in the fields. This proceeding naturally led to a not altogether friendly exchange

of compliments with the Roman colonists. As the Huns unfortunately speak Latin only with their javelins and leather scourges, the conference resulted in the loss of a couple of lives. Of course this was on the part of the selfish peasants, who objected to the Hunnish horses breakfasting on the appetizing grain. Our Huns cut off the heads of the colonists, now happily freed from the Vandal yoke, hung them from the pommels of their saddles, and brought them, as an after-dinner dish, to our general.

Belisarius foamed with rage. He often does that. And when Belisarius lightens, then must Procopius provide the thunder.

I wrote, accordingly, a military decree to the effect that we have come here as the deliverers and friends of the provincials, and that, therefore, our soldiers will not be permitted to appropriate the best grain-fields as fodder for their horses or to play ball with the people's heads. "In this case," I wrote, "such conduct is not merely culpable: it is also stupid. For our small army has dared to land here only because we suppose that the provincials are hostile to the Vandals and will assist us." I impressed this view still more strongly upon our heroes—not upon their honor, not upon their conscience, but upon their stomachs.

"You will starve to death, my excellent friends," I wrote, "if the peasants bring you nothing to eat. If you kill them, those who are dead cannot sell you anything more, and the living, so far as they can help themselves, will not. Besides, your conduct will drive the provincials into an alliance with the Vandals. Therefore, spare the people—at least at the start. Else they will find out too soon that the Huns of Belisarius are worse than the Vandals of Gelimer. When once the emperor's tax-collectors take up their abode in the land, then, amiable descendants of Attila, there will be no further need to keep yourselves under constraint, for by that time the emancipated will have learned justly to appreciate their 'freedom.'"

To this purpose, only more elegantly and less frankly worded, ran the general's decree.

Our advance has begun. As yet no trace of the barbarians. Where are they? Where does he dream away the time, this King of the Vandals? Unless he awakes soon, he will awake without a kingdom.

We are steadily pushing forward, and fortune smiles upon us.

A day's march towards the west from our landing-place at Caput-Bada, on the road towards

Carthage, lies, not far from the sea, the city of Syllectum. Its old walls, it is true, have been torn down since Geiseric's time; but the inhabitants, in order to ward off the incursions of the Moors, have put the place again into a state of defence. Belisarius sent Borais, an officer of his body-guard, with a small detachment to attempt a coup-de-main upon the town. It succeeded admirably. After it had become dark our people crept up to the entrances,—they can hardly be called gates,—but found them barred and guarded. They passed the night in the ditches of the old fortifications, for it was possible there might be Vandals in the town. In the morning the peasants of the surrounding country came up with their large wains—it was market-day. Our men threatened the frightened peasants with death in case they gave any alarm, and compelled the drivers to conceal our soldiers under the coverings of their wagons. The guards of Syllectum removed the barricade at the entrance to the town in order that the wagons might enter as usual. Then our men sprang from their concealment, obtained possession of the city without a stroke of the sword,—there were no Vandals in it,—placed a guard in the senate-house and the forum, summoned the Catholic bishop and the principal citizens,—surpris-

ingly stupid people!—into the forum, and explained to them that they were now free, and happy, for were they not the subjects of Justinian? At the same time, however, our soldiers with drawn swords politely asked for breakfast. The senators of Syllectum handed Borais the keys of their city; unfortunately the gates that belonged to them were wanting, as the Vandals or the Moors had long ago burned these down. The bishop entertained our men in the vestibule of the church. Borais says the wine was very good. After breakfast the bishop blessed Borais, and asked him to re-establish the true and holy faith as quickly as possible. Borais, who is a Hun, is, unfortunately, also a heathen; consequently he did not understand very clearly what was expected of him. But he repeated to me several times that the wine was very good. Thus, you see, we have already delivered one African city. In the evening we all marched through. Belisarius enjoined upon us the strictest discipline, but I regret to say that the flames of a good many houses illuminated our march.

Beyond Syllectum we met with another stroke of good-fortune. The chief official whose duty it was to superintend the forwarding of the Vandal royal despatches was sent from Carthage by the

king some days ago with his horses, wagons, and many slaves, to bear the royal orders to all parts of the kingdom. He heard, on his way towards the east, of our landing, and sought us out, with all that he had with him.

All the despatches, all the secret messages of the Vandals are in the hands of Belisarius. A whole basketful, which I have to read over !

It is really as if an angel of the Lord had made us invisible and led us into the council-chamber of the Asdings. Most of the writings were dictated by Verus, the archdeacon of the Arians. In this priest, however, we have been thoroughly deceived. Theodora looks upon him as her tool. And he has become Gelimer's chancellor ! It is singular, though, that these state secrets are entrusted to a Roman rather than to a Vandal. Ought not Verus to have known how near we were when he sent these important letters without protection, as it were into our very hands ?

It is true, what is most important for us to know just now, namely, where the king and his army are at present, cannot be found out from these letters of a week ago. Yet we have learned from them what induces him to remain so far away from Carthage and the coast, on the verge of the desert, and indeed in the desert itself. He

has succeeded in making treaties with a number of Moorish tribes, and has obtained from them, as mercenaries, a force of many thousand infantry—almost as many as our whole army. These Moorish auxiliaries are assembling in Numidia, in the plain of Bulla. That is far to the west of Carthage, near the border of the desert. Can it be possible that the Vandal will give up his capital and so much of his kingdom without a blow, and intends to await us yonder at Bulla?

Belisarius is now sending out—what a freak of chance!—by the official Vandal posts in all directions Justinian's declaration of war, and an invitation to all the Vandal nobles, leaders, and officials to revolt from Gelimer. The invitation is well worded, for I composed it myself. "It is not with the Vandals that I carry on war, nor do I break the peace agreed upon with Geiseric. Our purpose is merely to overthrow your tyrant, who has violated justice and thrown your lawful king into fetters. Help us therefore. Shake off the yoke of this base tyranny, that you may enjoy the freedom and prosperity we bring you. Of the truth of this, God is our witness."

XXVII.

MANY days' march westward from the road along which the Byzantines were advancing upon Carthage, and a considerable distance to the south of the Aurasian Mountains, the extreme limit of Vandal authority in Africa, lay a small oasis in the vast sand-desert which stretched away into the unexplored interior of the continent.

A well of drinkable water, around it in a circle some date-palms, under their shade a growth of coarse, salt-saturated, steppe-like grass, the welcome food of the easily satisfied camels,—that was all.

Beyond the oasis the desert extended in all directions in a monotonous plain, broken only where the wind had heaped together wave-like ridges of loose, yellow, burning sand. As far as the eye could sweep, even when the midday glare was brightest, it found nothing to rest upon, until, wearied with the effort, it sank back for relief upon the little clump of trees around the lonely well.

Now, however, it was night. And wonderful, indescribably impressive, was this silent solitude when over the whole wide-arching heavens the countless host of the stars appeared, shining with

a brilliancy which they display only to the sons of the desert.

It is easy to comprehend how these Moors have always associated whatever is divine with the stars. They worship in these the mild and beneficent powers of nature in contrast to the heat and storms of the desert. In the movements, position, and appearance of the stars they seek the will of the gods and their own future.

Some nomad Moors had pitched their low tents of goat-skin, perhaps half a dozen in number, beside the well. The faithful camels, carefully tethered by the feet and protected by coverings against the sting of the camel-fly, lay stretched out in the deep sand with their long necks thrust forward. In the midst of the little camp the noble-blooded coursers, the battle-steeds and the milch mares were placed in an enclosure, formed by stretching ropes between lances thrust into the ground. Above the rounded top of one of the tents rose a long spear, from which a lion's skin hung down. This was the tent of the chief.

The night-wind, which blew fresh from the northeast, from the distant sea, tossed about the fluttering mane of the dead monarch of the waste, and, now lifting the skin of one of the huge paws, now the bushy end of the tail, cast grotesque shadows upon the starlit sand.

A deep, solemn silence prevailed. All that was living seemed to be buried in sleep, save where, at an arrow's flight on each side of the tents, four great fires burned, kindled to keep off the night-prowling beasts of prey. From these fires came at long intervals the monosyllabic calls of the guards, who by this means kept themselves awake and warned their comrades to be watchful. For a long, long time this deep, solemn stillness continued. At length a couple of horses whinnied, the clang of a weapon was heard in the direction of one of the fires, and a moment afterwards a light, scarcely audible step advanced towards the midst of the encampment, to the "lion's tent."

Suddenly the step was checked, and a slender, youthful man stooped down before the entrance. "What? You are lying outside, before the tent, grandfather?" the astonished youth asked. "Have you been asleep?"

"I have been awake," was the low answer.

"I should really have ventured to wake you. A frightful portent has appeared in the sky. I saw it rise as I kept watch at the eastern fire. Just relieved, I hasten to you. The gods above send us warning; but the young man does not understand their signs. You, O grandfather, are

wise. Look there, to the right—to the right of the last palm-tree! Do you not see it?”

“I saw it long ago. I have been expecting this sign for many nights—yes, for years.”

A feeling of awe came over the youth. With a slight shudder he said: “For years! You knew, then, what would happen in the sky? You are very wise, O Cabaon!”

“Not I. My grandfather handed down the knowledge to my father, and he to me. It was more than a hundred years ago. It was when the pale-faced strangers came from the north, in many ships, across the sea, led by that terrible king, with whose name even to-day our women silence their refractory children.”

“Geiseric!” muttered the youth in a low voice, full, however, of hate and horror.

“At that time, from the same quarter as their ships, a terrible prodigy appeared in the heavens. It was blood-red, and in shape like a hundred-lashed scourge, swung threateningly over our land and people.

“And my grandfather, after he had seen the fearful warrior-king in the harbor of Isocium, spoke to my father and our tribe: ‘Untether the camels! Bridle our horses and away! To the south! To the glowing bosom of our protecting

mother! It was this king of battles and his war-delighting people that the fiery star announced. For many years, for many decades, all are lost who attempt to oppose him. The armies of Rome, the ships of Byzantium, will be swept away by these giants from the north, like the clouds which come in the way of the fiery star.' And so it happened. The sons of our race, although they would gladly have shot their long arrows against the blond giants, followed the advice of the old man, and we escaped into the protecting desert.

"Bonifacius—that was the name of the Roman general—was utterly defeated. My ancestor had announced it beforehand in the prophetic speech: 'G. will destroy B. But,' he added, 'the time will come, more than a hundred years from now, when a starry portent will rise in the east, and then B. will overthrow G.'

"Other branches of our people, when, by the side of the imperial troops, they attempted to repel the invaders, were, like the Romans, cut down by Geiseric, that son of darkness. And when, howling and lamenting for their dead, they came to our tents and summoned us to a war of vengeance, then my grandfather and afterwards my father refused them and said: 'Not yet; they cannot now be conquered. Several generations of men

will pass away, and no one will be able to stand before these giants from the land of darkness, neither the Romans by sea nor the sons of the desert. But they will not endure in the land of the sun, these children of the north! Many a warrior-race, more powerful than we, has come before them into our motherland to conquer and rule over us. They have, indeed, conquered us, but not this land, this sun, these deserts. Sand and sun and luxurious indolence have taken from the strangers the strength of their arms and the energy of their will. So it will happen to these tall, blue-eyed giants. The strength will be lured away from their muscular bodies, and the desire for battle from their hearts. And then—then, at length, we shall wrest from them the inheritance left us by our fathers! Thus it was prophesied and thus it has happened.

“For many years our archers and spearmen could not stand before the fierce enemy; but more recently we have often driven them back, when they penetrated into the sacred desert.

“‘Whenever a similar star appears,’ my ancestor predicted, ‘then the time allotted to these strangers has expired. Observe carefully from what quarter another star with a fiery train, like a scourge, shall appear—for from there will come

the enemy that will crush the yellow-haired race.' The star to-night has risen from the east—from the east approaches the conqueror of Geiseric's people.

"It is true we have news that the emperor is bringing war upon the Vandals, that his army has already landed in the distant east. But it does not coincide—the other sign. G, no doubt, means Gelimer, the blond-haired king. But J, Justinian, is the name of the emperor of Byzantium. Tell me, have you heard who is the general in command of the Romans?"

"Belisarius."

The old man sprang up. "And B will conquer G—Belisarius will overthrow Gelimer. See how blood-red the scourge-like star is glowing! That betokens the blood of battle. But we, son of my son, we will take no part when the Byzantine spear and the Vandal sword are arrayed against each other. The combat may easily extend as far as the Auras mountains; we will withdraw deeper into the desert. Let the foreigners rage against each other; let the one destroy the other. For the Byzantine eagles also will not long build their eyries here. The star of disaster will rise for them, just as it does now for the Vandals. The invaders come—and pass away.

We, the sons of the land, endure. Like the sand of our desert we are driven before the wind ; but we do not perish. And as the sand sweeps over and covers the stately stone buildings of our invaders, so we, always returning, overwhelm the foreign life which has intruded itself into our land, where it can never thrive."

"But the fair-skinned king has enlisted more than ten thousand of our people for the war. What are these to do?"

"Send back his gold. Abandon the heaven-abandoned army of the Vandals. Let messengers ride to-morrow to all our tribes with this command wherever I command, with this advice where I can only advise."

"Your advice is law as far as the sand of the desert stretches. Yet I am sorry for the man with the mournful eyes. He has shown kindness to many of our people, has been the guest of many of our tribes, has himself extended hospitality to them. How are these to act towards their friend and guest?"

"Extend hospitality even unto death. Not fight his battles, not share his booty. But if he comes to them for refuge and protection—share the last date with him, pour out the last drop of blood in his defence. Up, strike upon the kettle!

We break camp before the sun awakes. Untether the camels." And the old man sprang nimbly to his feet.

The youth struck a blow with his sword upon a large copper kettle which hung before the entrance to the tent. Scarcely had the sound ceased when the brown-complexioned men, women, and children began swarming forth confusedly, like a heap of disturbed ants.

When the sun rose above the horizon the oasis was deserted, solitary, as still as death itself.

But far off to the south a cloud of dust and sand was visible, which the north wind seemed to drive steadily onward farther into the depths of the desert.

XXVIII.

TO CETHEGUS FROM PROCOPIUS.

OUR advance continues. And just as if we were in a friendly country. Our heroes, even the Huns, at last comprehend this,—thanks less to my military decree than to their personal experience that they cannot, even with the best intentions, obtain as abundant supplies by plundering, as the people voluntarily bring in, provided the peasants are paid, and not robbed. Belisarius is winning

the hearts of all the provincials by his affability and kindness. So the colonists stream from all sides to our camps, which we carefully fortify whenever we have occasion to pass the night on the open plain. And the people sell us, at a reasonable price, all that we need.

Whenever it is possible, of course, we take up our quarters for the night in cities, such as Leptis and Adrumetum. The bishop with the Catholic clergy comes to meet us as soon as our Hunnish riders appear in sight. The "senators" and the most distinguished citizens soon follow. These, however, prefer to make a pretence of suffering compulsion. That is to say, they wait until we stand in their forum, in order that, in case we should all even yet be pitched into the sea by our invisible enemy before we reach Carthage, they can point to our irresistible force as an excuse for their friendliness towards us.

With the exception of a few Catholic priests, I have not yet met a single Roman in Africa for whom I have a particle of respect. To my notion, the "delivered" are even poorer specimens of humanity than we, the "deliverers."

Every day in our progress we leave behind us ten thousand paces—ten miles.

To-day we came from Adrumetum, by way of Horrea to Grasse,—still about forty-four Roman miles from Carthage,—an ideal place for a camp! Our astonishment increases from day to day, the more we become familiar with the luxuriance of this province of Africa. It surpasses all description, all expectation. Truly, under this sky, and amid these surroundings, not to become indolent is a thing that almost transcends human power.

And this Grasse! Here is a country-seat, properly speaking, a stately, pillared marble palace of the Vandal king, surrounded by pleasure-gardens, the like of which I have never beheld in Europe or Asia.

All around us gush forth fountains of delicious water, brought from a distance by gracefully built conduits, or conjured by some magic art from the depths of the arid sand. And what an abundance of trees! Among them not one whose branches are not bent down by the weight of its superb fruit. Our whole army is encamped in this fruit-bearing grove, under these beneficent trees; every soldier satisfies himself to the full, and every one has filled his leather knapsack,—for early to-morrow we resume our march,—and yet the supply is not half exhausted.

What a wealth, too, of vines, and all of them loaded with magnificent grapes!

For many centuries before Scipio entered this land as a conqueror, here, between the desert and the sea, the industrious Phœnicians trained on short stakes their carefully pruned vines. Here to-day grows the best wine in all Africa; the Vandals are said to drink it unmixed in great draughts from their helmets. I only sipped a little of the blackish-red liquor, which Agnellus had reduced one half in strength for me with water, and yet I feel sleepy. I think I will not write much more to-night.

Sleep well, Cethegus, in your distant Rome!

Sleep well, my comrades in arms!

Just half a cupful more before I retire; it really is exceedingly good.

Sleep well—the wine makes me feel kind-hearted! Sleep well, you also, barbarians!

How comfortable it is here! The slaves, all of whom are Romans and Catholics, have not fled from us, and they serve us with most zealous attention. This room which has been assigned to me is very handsomely adorned with wall-paintings. The bed is as soft and inviting as one could wish for. From the sea comes a cool, refreshing breeze through the open windows.

I think I may venture upon a quarter of a cup more, but that must be the last. And to-night,

my dear barbarians, refrain, if possible, from any attack. Sleep soundly, Vandals, I pray, that I too may have a sweet sleep! I almost believe that I am already in the grasp of that African malady—distaste for every exertion.

It is four days since we left the wonderful gardens at Grasse. We pass to-night in the open country. To-morrow we shall reach Decimum, only nine Roman miles from Carthage, and as yet we have not seen a single Vandal.

It is late in the evening. Far and wide glow the lights of our camp-fires—a beautiful sight. But I cannot rid myself of the feeling that there is something ominous in this soft, dark air. There go the shrill horns of our Huns! They keep guard on all three sides. On the right, towards the northeast, the sea and our fleet cover us. To-morrow, however, the ships cannot, as hitherto, accompany our advance, on account of the rocks which extend far out from the shore, off the promontory of Mercury. These the ships will have to sail around. Belisarius has commanded the Quæstor Archelaos, who is in charge of the fleet, not to venture himself to Carthage, but after circumnavigating the promontory, to cast anchor and await further orders.

Since therefore, to-morrow, for the first time, we must push forward without the protection of our faithful companions, the ships, and the road before reaching Decimum is said to pass through some rough and dangerous places, Belisarius has arranged the order of march carefully in advance, and has given it in writing this evening to all the leaders, to save time when we break camp in the morning.

The trumpet wakes the sleeper with its warlike blast. Our ranks are forming. I see an eagle flying from the west, out of the desert, over our camp.

It is reported that last night, on our extreme outposts in the west, the first conflict took place with a couple of the enemy's horsemen; that one of our Huns was killed, and one of the captains, Bleda, is missing. But I could not learn anything definite. Probably it is merely a camp rumor, such as impatience and imagination have hatched out several times before.

To-night, then, we will be in Decimum; to-morrow night before the gates of Carthage;—and where are the Vandals?

XXIX.

WHEN Procopius wrote the above lines, the Vandals were nearer to him than he supposed.

As the first beams of the morning sun rose above the sea, gleamed from its waves, and fell upon the yellowish-brown sand on the verge of the desert, a dozen Vandal horsemen dashed at full gallop into the camp of King Gelimer, about two hours' march southwest of Decimum. Gibamund, who commanded them, and the young Ammata sprang from their horses.

"What do you bring?" asked the watch at the camp.

"Victory," replied Ammata.

"And a prisoner," added Gibamund.

They hastened to wake the king. But they met him, in full armor, just coming from his tent.

"You are splashed with blood—both—you too, Ammata. Are you wounded?" he said in a voice that quivered with anxiety.

"No," laughed the handsome boy, while his eyes flashed with pride. "It is the blood of an enemy."

"The first that has been shed in this war stains your innocent hand," said the king, solemnly. "Would that I had not consented—"

"That would have been a pity," interrupted Gibamund: "Our boy deserves much credit for his conduct. Go, Ammata, summon Hilda from my tent while I make my report.

"Well, then! We have long endured it with impatience that you keep us so far from the enemy, accompanying their march only at a distance, unseen even by their outposts. When you granted last night that we might ride nearer to their flank than hitherto, to find out whether they really, uncovered by their fleet, will march to-day to Decimum and, consequently, towards midday, pass through the narrow road, you said that if, without too much noise, we could bring in a captive to answer your questions, it would be desirable.

"Well, we have not only a captive, we have something more. We found on him a most important piece of parchment. And that was fortunate, for the man refuses to give any information. See, they are bringing him here! And yonder come Thrasaric and Eugenia. And there is Ammata already leading Hilda by the hand."

"Welcome!" cried the young wife to her husband, but with a blush she declined his embrace. Already the prisoner stood before the king, his hands bound behind his back; from under his bushy eyebrows he cast sullen looks upon the

Vandals—especially upon Ammata. From his left cheek the blood trickled down upon the white sheep-skin that covered his shoulders. His undergarment, which was of untanned leather, reached down to his knees, his feet were bare, but buckled to his right heel was a strap to which a large spur was attached. Four ornamental golden plates, presented by the emperor and his generals as testimonials of valiant deeds, hung from a breastplate fashioned from leather of extraordinary thickness.

“We rode forth from the camp towards the north, accompanied only by ten Vandals and two Moors, in the direction of the light given by the hostile camp-fires, and carefully concealing ourselves behind the long sand-hills, which the ever-busy wind of the desert, now heaping up and now blowing away, continually forms, especially along the border. Under this cover we worked our way to the east until we perceived, at about an arrow’s flight from us, four horsemen beside a watch-fire, kindled probably to frighten away the wild beasts. Two of them sat perched upon their little horses, gazing sharply towards the southwest, whence we had come, their bows ready in their hands. The other two had dismounted and stood leaning each against the shoulder of his horse; the points of their spears sparkled in the fitful firelight.

“I motioned to the two Moors, whom I had taken with me for this very artifice. They slipped noiselessly from their horses, threw themselves flat upon the ground, and crept in the darkness, on all-fours, in a wide circuit, one to the right and the other to the left, around the fire and the watch, until they stood to the northwest and the northeast of these.

“Soon we heard to the north of the watch-fire the hoarse, savage cry of the prey-scenting leopardess which has set out by night with her young in search of food. The cry of the old leopard was answered by the eager, hungry response of her whelp. The horses of the watch started with terror, their manes bristled. Nearer came the cry of the leopardess; then all the four men—doubtless they had never heard such a thing before—turned in the direction of the sound. One of the horses reared violently; his rider clung desperately to his mane. The second horseman endeavored to help his comrade, and seized the bridle of the frightened horse, but, in so doing, his bow slipped from his hand. Taking advantage of this moment of confusion, we sprang forward from behind the sand-hill. We had muffled the hoofs of the horses with cloths, and we rode up almost to the fire before we were noticed. Then

one of the mounted men perceived us, shouted, 'Enemies!' and dashed away. The other horseman followed him. The third I ran through with my sword, just as he was in the act of mounting. But the fourth—this one here, the leader—in an instant was on the back of his steed, knocking down the two Moors, who attempted to bar the way, and would have escaped, had not Ammata, our boy—"

He pointed to the lad, while the prisoner gnashed his teeth with anger.

"Shot after him, like an arrow, on his white pony—"

"On Pegasus," cried Ammata. "You remember, brother, you brought him to me from the last Moorish war. He really speeds along as if he had wings."

"Overtook him, and before any of us could hasten to his assistance, with a quick double stroke—"

"You, Gelimer, taught it to me," shouted the exultant Ammata, who could no longer restrain himself.

"—of his sword beat aside the enemy's long spear, and at once gave him a slashing cut across the cheek. Stifling his pain, the sturdy fellow dropped his spear and attempted to draw the bat-

tle-axe from his belt. Then Ammata threw the noose around his neck—”

“You know—the antelope-cast !” cried the boy to Gelimer.

“—and with a jerk pulled him from his horse.”

Gibamund had related this in the Vandal tongue. But the prisoner understood it all from the accompanying gestures, and now he shouted, in the mongrel Latin of the camp: “May the soul of my father pass into a dog, if I do not have revenge for this! Me, the child of Attila’s great-grandson! A boy pulls me with a noose from my horse! They catch beasts that way, not soldiers!”

“Cool down, my little friend,” said Thrasaric, stepping up to him. “There is an old saying current among all the Gothic peoples: ‘Spare rather the wolf than the Hun.’ Besides, it is thus that royal bird, the ostrich, is captured, provided any one can overtake him. So, you see, it is no disgrace for you.” And, laughing, he adjusted his heavy helmet with its bear’s-head decoration.

“We now came up,” concluded Gibamund, “bound the man, who defended himself like a wild-boar, and tore from between his teeth this piece of parchment, which he was attempting to swallow.”

The prisoner groaned.

"Your name?" asked the king, glancing over the parchment.

"Bleda."

"What is your general's strength in horsemen?"

"Go and count them."

"My Hunnish friend," said Thrasaric threateningly, "a king is addressing you. Be polite, you wolf's cub. Answer properly the questions put to you, or—"

Defiantly the captive took a step forward towards Gelimer; and spoke: "This golden disk our great commander gave me with his own hand after our third victory over the Persians. Do you think I will betray Belisarius?"

"Lead him away," said Gelimer. "Bind up his wounds. See that he has good care."

Once again the Hun cast a look of deadly hate upon Ammata, and then passed out with his guards.

Gelimer read again the writing on the parchment; then, turning to his young brother, said: "It is no slight thanks I owe you, my boy. What you have brought us is the enemy's order of march for to-day. Follow me, my captains, to my tent; there you shall hear my plan of attack. We need not wait the coming up of the Moors. I think, if

the Lord our God is not angry with us—but no sinful boasting! O Ammata, how glad I am to have you back alive! After you had ridden forth I had a bloody dream about you. God has restored you to me this once—I will not venture to try his forbearance a second time.” He stepped up close to Ammata and, laying his hand upon the boy’s shoulder, spoke in a positive tone: “Hear me: I forbid you to take part in the battle to-day.”

“What?” cried Ammata vehemently, while the blood forsook his face. “That is not possible! Gelimer—I beseech—”

“Be still,” commanded the king, furrowing his brow, “and obey.”

“I should think,” interposed Gibamund, “you might grant him permission. He has shown—”

“O brother, brother!” Ammata exclaimed, while the tears gathered in his eyes, “how have I deserved this punishment?”

“Is that his reward for his exploit last night?” expostulated Thrasaric.

“Be silent, all of you,” Gelimer commanded sternly. “My resolution is fixed. He shall not fight. He is still only a boy.”

Ammata stamped his foot angrily.

“And oh, my darling,” added Gelimer, clasping

the resisting boy in his arms, "let me confess it, —so tenderly I love, that my anxiety about you would not leave me for a moment even in the midst of the battle. And I need all my thoughts for the enemy."

"Then let me fight at your side, where you can yourself protect me."

"I dare not. I must not think about you. I must give all my attention to Belisarius."

"Truly," said Hilda, excitedly, "from my soul I am sorry for Ammata. I am a woman, and it is hard enough for me not to follow you to the combat. But a boy, and fifteen years old too!"

Here Eugenia, laying her hand on the speaker's robe, gently sought to pull her back; but Hilda, drawing the boy to her and stroking with her hand his wavy blond hair, continued: "But it is a duty. It is heroic duty that every man who can—and especially a prince of the royal line—shall fight for his country. And this one can—he has proved it. Do not withhold him from his people. My grandfather taught me: 'He only falls who is destined to fall.'"

"Sinful heathenism!" exclaimed the king angrily.

"Well, then, let me speak to you as a Christian. Is this your trust in God, Gelimer? Where is

there another in both armies as innocent as this child? O king, I am not, I admit, so religious as you; but I have confidence enough in the God of heaven to believe that he will protect this youth while battling in our just cause. Yes, more, if this noblest and purest offspring of the Asdings should perish, it would be to me like a judgment of God that we are really outcasts from his presence."

"Hold!" cried the king, bitterly. "Do not tear open the deepest wounds of my soul. If he *should* fall? If really a judgment of God, such as you speak of, should be executed so terribly against us? It is true he is guiltless, so far as a mortal can be. But have you forgotten the fearful threat about the iniquities of the parents? If I should live to see that, I believe I should despair; for I should recognize the fulfilment of the avenging curse." And with gloomy brow and folded arms he paced nervously back and forth.

Here Gibamund whispered to his wife, who indignantly shook her head, but made no reply. "Let him have his way. Such cares in the mind of the commander-in-chief will injure more than the spears of twenty boys could help us."

"But," Ammata exclaimed defiantly, "arrows fly far. If I, like a miserable coward, hide behind

our ranks, even here in the camp, if the enemy should conquer, I might fall; although I certainly should never become a captive," he added haughtily, clutching his dagger and tossing back his head so that his blond locks brushed across the light-blue armor that protected his shoulders. "Better shut me up at once in a church—a Catholic one, by all means! That would be a perfect asylum."

"I shall indeed imprison you, you unruly boy," said Gelimer, sharply. "As a punishment for this insolent mockery, give up your arms at once. At once, I say! Take them from him, Thrasaric.—You, Thrasaric, will attack the enemy in front, from Decimum. In Decimum there is a Catholic church; the Byzantines will hold it inviolable. During the battle keep as a prisoner there this boy, who wants to be a soldier and has not yet learned to obey his king. In case of retreat take him with you. And hear me, Thrasaric: you promised that night, in the grove, to atone for the past—"

"I think he *has* done it," cried Hilda, indignantly.

"Whose squadrons," joined in Gibamund, "are the best drilled? Who has furnished so much gold, so many horses and arms, as he?"

"As yet, my king," replied Thrasaric, "I have done nothing. Give me to-day an opportunity—"

"You shall have it. I rely upon you—especially that you do not through your impetuosity, by a too early attack, ruin my entire plan. And as for this troublesome boy," he said tenderly, "I place him in your keeping. Let him take no part in the battle, and bring him to me safe and unhurt after the victory, upon which I surely reckon. I entrust to you also all the captives, among them the hostages from Carthage, for in case of a retreat you will be the nearest to the place selected,—its location you shall soon learn,—and the prisoners, therefore, will be safest in your care. I confide to you Ammata, my most precious treasure, because—well, because you are—my valiant, faithful Thrasaric." And he placed both his hands on the broad, Herculean shoulders.

"King," said the stalwart giant, as he looked Gelimer steadily in the eye, "you shall have him back alive and uninjured, or you shall never again see Thrasaric."

Eugenia started.

"I thank you by the trust I place in you. Come now, my generals, to my tent to hear my plan of battle."

XXX.

TO CETHEGUS FROM PROCOPIUS.

WELL, we are still alive! And quartered for the night in Decimum!

But we all came very near passing the night in a body with the dog-fish at the bottom of the Mediterranean. Never, says Belisarius, did annihilation so seriously threaten him.

We were brought for a time into fearful peril by the skilfully devised attack of this incomprehensible king. And then when the attack had fully succeeded, it was he, the king himself, who threw away his victory and saved us from certain destruction.

I put together briefly the facts concerning these latest occurrences, combining our own experience with what we have learned from the inhabitants of Decimum and the captured Vandals.

Unknown to us, the king had accompanied our march ever since our landing. He had long before selected, with excellent judgment, the place where he suddenly fell upon us. Belisarius says that not even his great rival, Narses, could have planned the affair more skilfully.

When we marched from our last camp towards Decimum we had to do without, as I told you be-

fore, the protection afforded to our right flank by our fleet. If now an overmastering assault should be made upon us from the west, it would not here drive us, as hitherto, back upon our supporting ships, but would hurl us down from the road leading over the steep sand-hills along the coast headlong into the sea.

Before reaching Decimum—which is a small, open place—the road becomes exceedingly narrow. High hills stretch from the southwest close up to the confined passage-way. Over their masses of loose sand, blown hither from the desert, neither man nor horse can pass without sinking a foot deep at every step. Here we were to be simultaneously attacked from three sides, and driven into the sea on our right.

Gibamund, a brother of the king, with two thousand men was to fall upon our left flank from the west; on the north a Vandal noble with a strong force was to attack us in front from Decimum; while the king himself was to hurl his main army from the south upon our rear.

Belisarius had carefully arranged our order of march for this dangerous portion of the way. He sent Fara with his brave Heruli and with three hundred picked men from the body-guard two and a half Roman miles in advance. They were first

to traverse by themselves the narrow pass, and at once to report to the main body, which Belisarius commanded, any danger. The Hunnish riders were sent out on our left flank, together with five thousand excellent Thracian infantry, under their leader Althias, to repel every attack which might be threatened from that quarter, and to guard against a surprise of the main army during the march.

It happened to our great good-fortune that the attack from the north, from Decimum, took place much too soon.

We learn from prisoners that a younger brother of the king, almost a boy, taking part in the battle contrary to Gelimer's express command, dashed forward from Decimum with a few horsemen against our advancing column as soon as it came in sight. The Vandal noble in command, wishing to rescue the young prince at every cost, made his attack upon us, with the small force he had with him, at least four hours before the appointed time, merely sending messengers towards Carthage to hurry up the troops advancing to his support.

In spite of the overwhelming numbers that assailed them, the youth and the nobleman made a desperate stand. Twelve of the bravest of Beli-

sarius's body-guard, veterans of former campaigns, were slain by them. At length they both fell. And now, deprived of their leaders, the Vandal riders turned their horses, and, dispersed in a senseless flight, ran down all who were hurrying from Carthage to their assistance—for the most part small companies of thirty or forty men. Fara and his bold Heruli started after them in swift pursuit, putting to the sword all whom they overtook, for a distance of eight miles, almost to the very gates of Carthage. The Vandals, who had fought bravely as long as they had before their eyes the example of the young Asding and the nobleman, now threw away their arms and suffered themselves to be slaughtered almost without resistance. We found many thousands of their dead along the highway and scattered over the fields to the left.

After this first attack of the Vandals had resulted in the destruction of the assailants, Gibamund, apparently without any knowledge of what had happened, charged with his cavalry, at the time appointed, upon the greatly superior forces of the Huns and Thracians, about five miles west of Decimum. Without help from Carthage and Decimum his assault necessarily miscarried; almost all his followers were killed, and their leader

was seen to fall—no one knows whether living or dead.

In the mean time, ignorant of what was going on; we continued advancing with the main body of our army on the road towards Decimum. When about four miles from the town Belisarius observed a place favorable for a camp, and ordered the army to halt. He knew, of course, that the enemy must be in the vicinity, and the disappearance of the two Huns in the night had made him cautious.

He formed a well-fortified camp, and addressed the assembled army. "The enemy," he said, "must be near. If they attack us here, where the fleet cannot assist us, our only safety lies in victory. If we are defeated, there is no fortress, no strong city, to receive us. The sea that roars below there will devour us. Our fortified camp and the tried swords in our hands afford our only protection. Fight valiantly, then; for life as well as glory is at stake."

Leaving the infantry with the baggage and utensils in camp as a strong reserve, he now led all the cavalry forward towards Decimum. For he was anxious not to risk everything upon a single cast, but to find out first by means of a cavalry skirmish the strength and plans of the

enemy. He sent the auxiliary cavalry in advance, and followed with the remaining squadrons and his mounted body-guard. When the auxiliary cavalry reached Decimum they came upon the Byzantines and Vandals who had fallen there. Most of the inhabitants of the place had fled to Carthage, when they discovered that their village had been selected as the battle-field. Two or three, however, were found concealed in the houses, and they reported to us what had taken place.

Here a wonderfully beautiful woman, the owner of the finest villa in Decimum,—she looks something like the sphinx at Memphis,—voluntarily came forward and told us about the death of the nobleman, which she had herself witnessed. He fell before her house, under her very eyes.

The leaders now consulted together, undecided whether to advance, to halt, or to return to Belisarius. Finally the entire force of auxiliary cavalry moved forward about two miles west from Decimum, in order to obtain a better outlook in all directions from the high sand-hills at that place.

Suddenly from the south-southwest, and, consequently, on their rear and left flank, rose a huge cloud of dust, and soon there could be discerned through it the gleam of arms and the field-insignia

of a vast body of cavalry. Messengers were at once despatched to Belisarius to announce that he need look no further; the enemy had been found.

Meanwhile the barbarians rapidly drew nearer, led by Gelimer himself. They were approaching along a road leading between Belisarius's main body to the east and the Huns and Thracians on the left wing who had defeated Gibamund and were pursuing far to the west the fleeing remnant of his force. But the hills along the road cut off Gelimer's view, so that he could not overlook Gibamund's battle-field. Both Byzantines and Vandals, as soon as they perceived each other, endeavored to gain the summit of a high hill which commanded the entire surrounding country. The barbarians reached the top first, and from it King Gelimer hurled himself with such fury upon our auxiliary cavalry that these, struck with terror, broke their ranks and fled in wild disorder to the east, towards Decimum.

About nine hundred paces west of Decimum, the fugitives came upon a strong body of reserves, a force of eight hundred mounted shield-bearers, led by Belox, an officer of Belisarius's body-guard. Our general and all of us, who had seen with consternation the flight of our auxiliary cavalry, com-

forted ourselves with the hope that Belox would stay the rout, gather together the fleeing troopers, and advance with them upon the enemy. But oh, disgrace and horror ! So terrific was the onset of the Vandals that neither the fugitives nor the shield-bearers attempted to sustain their charge, but all together took to flight and came rushing in uncontrollable panic right back upon Belisarius.

Our general says that at that moment he gave up himself and all of us for lost. "Gelimer," said he, as we were taking our evening meal, "had the victory in his hands. Why he—voluntarily—let it fall from them is inexplicable. Had he followed up our fleeing troops, he would have swept me and all my force irresistibly into the sea—so great was the fright of our men and the impetuosity of the Vandal assault. Then the camp and the infantry would have inevitably been overpowered. Or had he, on the other hand, turned back from Decimum towards Carthage, he could have annihilated, almost without resistance, Fara and his men, who, expecting no attack from their rear, were scattered along the road and through the fields in small parties, engaged in plundering the slain. And when in possession of Carthage, he could have captured easily our unguarded fleet, anchored in the vicinity, and cut us off from every hope either of victory or of return."

But King Gelimer did neither. A sudden paralysis fell upon the energetic will that was so successfully carrying everything before it.

Our captives tell us that as he charged down the hill, spurring his gray horse far in advance of his followers, he espied in the narrow pass, at the southern entrance of Decimum, first of all the corpse of his young brother lying in the road. With a piercing cry of grief he sprang from his horse, threw himself upon the body of the boy, and thus blocked the progress of his cavalry, whose foremost horses, held back with difficulty by their riders that they might not trample the king under their hoofs, reared, plunged, and backed, throwing the ranks behind them into confusion, and bringing the whole pursuit to a stand. The king lifted up in his arms the disfigured corpse, all covered with blood and sand,—for our calvary in their flight had swept over it,—placed it upon his horse, and commanded that it should be buried with royal honors on one side of the highway, himself assisting in the work. The whole affair probably did not take more than a quarter of an hour. But this quarter of an hour cost the barbarians the victory they had won.

For in the mean time Belisarius rushed up to our fugitives, roared out at them with his lion's voice

his all-compelling "Halt!" and, raising his helmet, showed them his countenance all ablaze with anger, a thing which his soldiers fear more than the spears of all the barbarians alive. Then he brought to a stand the now thoroughly ashamed soldiers, arranged them—amid a storm of furious reproaches—as well as the shortness of time permitted, and, having found out what it was necessary for him to know concerning the position and strength of the barbarians, advanced in turn upon Gelimer and the Vandals.

They made but a feeble resistance. The sudden, to them unintelligible, stoppage of their charge had bewildered, amazed, disheartened them; besides, they had expended their strength in that furious ride. Fearfully hot, seriously troubling us also, poured down the rays of the African sun. Our first onset broke through their ranks. Then they turned and fled. Their king, who attempted to stop them, was swept along by the tide. The direction of their flight was not towards Carthage, nor yet towards Byzacium in the southwest, whence they had come, but towards the north-northwest, along the road which leads to Numidia, to the plain of Bulla. Whether this was by command of the king or without it, we do not yet know.

We made a fearful slaughter of the fleeing enemy. Only night put an end to the pursuit.

When darkness had set in, and the torches and watch-fires were lighted, Fara and his Heruli rejoined us from the north, and Althias with the Huns and Thracians from the west. Then all together we took up our quarters for the night in Decimum, celebrating three victories in one day,—over the nobleman, over Gibamund, and over the king.

XXXI.

THE fleeing Vandals, leaving Carthage far to their right, had taken the road leading from Decimum towards the northwest into Numidia.

A crowd of women and children, who, some days before, had abandoned Carthage, as an insecure place of refuge, had been sent already in the same direction, under a strong guard, from the camp of the previous night. These had halted at the little hamlet known as “*Castra Vetera*,” about half a day’s march from the field of battle. Here they were joined by the fugitives from Decimum, about two hours before midnight.

The army encamped on the open ground around the village, the many wounded and the

leaders being sheltered in the rude huts of the place and the by no means numerous tents brought with them by the women. In one of these tents lay Gibamund, stretched out upon coverlets and pillows. Hilda knelt beside him, busily occupied in renewing the bandage around his foot. As soon as she had done this she turned to Gundomar, who sat on the other side of the small enclosure, supporting his bandaged head upon his hand, while the blood was trickling down from his yellow hair. Carefully she examined the wound. "It is not fatal," she said at length. "Does it pain you much?"

"Not very much," said the Gunding, pressing his teeth tightly together. "Where is the king?"

"In the small chapel with Verus. He is praying." The words came bitterly from her lips.

"And my brother?" asked Gundomar. "How is it with his shoulder?"

"I cut the arrow-head out. The wound does not trouble him much. He is now in command of the guard. The king also is wounded."

"What?" exclaimed both the startled men. "He said nothing of it."

"His shame for his people kept him silent. For not an enemy, but fleeing Vandals, whom he forcibly attempted to stop and turn back, thrust their daggers into his arm."

"The dogs!" muttered Gundomar.

"Gundobad, who witnessed the affair, revealed it to me. Then I examined the arm; the wounds are not dangerous."

"And Eugenia?" Gundomar asked after a pause.

"She lies in the next tent, like one that has been stunned. When she heard of her husband's death, she cried: 'To him! Into his grave—Sigrun!'—I had related to her once the saga of Helgi—and she started, frenzied with grief, to rush forth, but, the next moment, fell swooning into my arms. Since she has recovered her senses she lies heart-broken upon the couch. 'To him!—Sigrun! Into his grave!—I am coming, Thrasaric!' is all that she says in answer to my questions. She wished to rise in order to hear more exact details, but she could not. And I forbade her positively to attempt it again. I will tell her what is best for her to know, nothing more. But if you are able, Gundomar, explain to us—I know all the rest—how Ammata, how Thrasaric—"

"In a moment," replied the Gunding. "First, one more drink of water.—And your wound, Gibamund?"

"Oh, that is nothing!" said the latter, bitterly.

"I did not even reach the enemy. Messenger after messenger I sent out to Thrasaric, when the expected announcement that he was advancing from Decimum failed to come. None of the messengers returned; all fell into the hands of the enemy. And no announcement from Thrasaric! The time decided upon for attack had fully arrived. Faithful to the king's command, I moved forward, although I perceived the greatly superior force of the foe, and although there were no signs of the main assault, no signs of Thrasaric. When we came within arrow-shot, the Hunnish horsemen sprang apart, to the right and to the left, and we saw the Thracian infantry, seven ranks deep. Then a shower of arrows fell upon us, aimed especially at the horses. Mine and all those of our first line fell at once. Your valiant brother, in the second rank, although himself hit by an arrow, lifted me with difficulty upon his own horse, for I could not stand, and saved me. On both flanks the Hunnish cavalry now charged upon us, while from the front the Thracians pressed forward with levelled spears. Scarcely a hundred of my two thousand men are left alive," he concluded with a groan.

"But tell me, how came Ammata—contrary to the king's orders, in spite of Thrasaric's precautions—" demanded Hilda.

"It happened thus," replied the Gunding, pressing his hand to the painful wound in his head. "We had placed the boy, deprived of his weapons, in the small Catholic basilica at Decimum, together with the hostages from Carthage and the young Publius Pudentius."

"And Hilderic and Euages?"

"No ; Verus had caused them to be taken to the second camp at Bulla. Bleda, the captive Hun, was fastened with a rope to the bronze ring outside of the church door ; he lay upon the uppermost step. On the open place before the little church were about twenty of our horsemen. At Thrasaric's command—he rode repeatedly to the spot, making a careful inspection of all the surroundings—many of them had dismounted, had thrust their spears into the sand beside their horses, and from the flat roofs of the neighboring houses were observing the enemy's slow approach from the southwest. I sat on horseback beside the open window of the basilica, from the corner of which there is an unbroken view to the beginning of the main street of Decimum, where Astarte's, formerly Modigisel's, villa lies. Thus I heard every word spoken in the church—as yet no Byzantines were in sight. Two boys were quarrelling violently.

“‘What!’ cried one, ‘is this the boasted heroism of the Vandals? You are staying in the asylum afforded by the church of the persecuted Catholics? You are seeking refuge here?’

“‘Command of the king,’ replied Ammata, his voice almost choked with rage.

“‘Ha!’ exclaimed the other, whose voice I now recognized—it was Pudentius. ‘I would submit to no such command from either king or emperor. I am fettered hand and foot; otherwise I should long since have been out there, fighting on the side of the Romans.’

“‘Command of the king, I tell you.’

“‘Command of cowardice! Were I a scion of the royal house whose crown is here at stake, nothing should hold me in a church while—hark! that is a trumpet. That is the Romans’ victorious—’

“‘I could hear no more, for just then from beyond Decimum rang out a loud peal of the Roman trumpets.’

Here the folds of the tent were gently pushed apart, and a pale face with two large, dark eyes appeared at the opening. No one noticed it.

“At the same instant a youthful form leaped out through the open window of the church—I do not understand how the boy got up there—

darted past me, sprang into the empty saddle upon the horse of one of our riders, wrested the spear beside it from the ground, and with the exultant shout: 'Vandals! Vandals!' galloped down the street toward the Byzantines.

"'Ammata! Ammata! Stop!' Thrasaric called to him; but the boy was already far on his way.

"'After him, Gundomar! After him! Save the boy!' shouted Thrasaric, as he dashed past me.

"I followed; our horsemen—a mere handful—did the same. 'Too soon! Much too soon!' I exclaimed as I overtook Thrasaric.

"'The king confided the boy to my care.'

"It was impossible to stop him, so I, too, rode on. We had reached already the narrow southern entrance to Decimum; on the right was the villa of Astarte, on the left the high stone wall of a grain-magazine. Ammata, without helmet, breast-plate, or shield, with only the spear in his hand, had halted in front of a whole troop of mounted lancers, who gazed in astonishment at the audacious boy.

"'Back, Ammata! Flee! I will protect the passage here!' cried Thrasaric.

"'I do not flee! I am a descendant of Geiseric,' was the boy's answer.

“‘Then we will die here together! Take my shield.’

“It was high time, for already the darts of the Byzantines flew thick about us. Our three horses fell, but we all sprang up uninjured. A javelin stuck in the shield which Thrásaric had pressed upon the boy, piercing through the emblazoned hammer. A dozen of our horsemen now came up behind us. Six of them sprang from their steeds and levelled their spears, barring effectually the narrow entrance. The Byzantines rushed upon us, but there was room for three horses only abreast. We three ran through two lancers and a horse. The enemy were compelled to remove their dead, and also the fallen horses, in order to make fighting-room for themselves. While they were attempting to do this, Ammata sprang forward and stabbed another of the Byzantines. As he leaped back, a dart grazed his throat; the blood spurted out, but the boy only laughed. Again the enemy charged upon us, and again two of them fell. But so many spears were now fixed in his shield that Ammata was compelled to lower it, and Thrásaric received a lance-thrust in his left arm.

“And now behind the Byzantines we heard the sound of German horns. They resembled those

of our cavalry. 'Gibamund! Or the king!' exclaimed our followers. 'We are saved!'

"On the contrary, we were hopelessly lost. They were Herulians in the emperor's service. Their leader, a tall figure, with the wings of an eagle above his helmet, assumed command of all the enemy. He caused several of his horsemen to dismount and to climb the wall of the granary on his right, while others galloped off to the left, to ride around the villa. At the same time they poured upon us a perfect storm of darts. The boar's helmet, struck at once by two javelins, flew from my head, while a third stretched me on the ground. At this moment, while our whole attention was turned towards the enemy in front, a man on foot rushed up from behind through our horsemen. I heard a hoarse exclamation, 'Wait, boy!' and I saw the gleam of a weapon. Ammata fell forward upon his knee.

"It was Bleda, the captive Hun. He still dragged after him the broken rope attached to his foot. He had torn himself loose and seized a weapon. Before, however, he could draw out his sword from the boy's back, Thrasaric ran him through with his spear. But the valiant nobleman had forgotten the assailants in front. He no longer thrust aside as hitherto the flying javelins. Two spears

struck him at once; with a deep wound in his thigh he staggered back against the wall of the villa. Then suddenly a small gate opened, and in the opening stood Astarte. 'Come, my love, I will save you,' she said, and grasped him by the arm. 'A secret passage from my cellar—'

"Without a word Thrasaric tore himself loose and threw himself before the kneeling boy. And now there pressed forward against them whole troops of Herulians and Byzantines, both on horse and on foot. The little gate was closed again.

"I tried to rise, but could not. And so, unable to give any help, but protected myself by the dead body of my horse, I saw the end.

"I make the story short. So long as he could move an arm, the faithful Thrasaric protected the boy with sword and spear, and, when at length the spear was beaten from his hand and his sword broken, with his own body. I saw how, spreading over him the huge bear-skin as a shield, he clasped both his arms around Ammata's breast.

"'Surrender, valiant man!' called out the leader of the Heruli. 'But Thrasaric.— Hark! what was that?'"

"A groan. Was it you, Gibamund? Does your foot pain so much?"

"I was silent. Doubtless it was some night-bird outside the tent,"

"But Thrasaric shook his massive head, and hurled the handle of his sword in the face of the nearest Byzantine, so that he fell with a cry of agony.

"Then came such a flight of spears that Ammata sank down dead upon the ground. Thrasaric did not fall, but remained standing in a half-stooping posture, both arms hanging down before him. The leader of the Heruli stepped up close to him and said: 'Assuredly I have never seen such a thing as this before! The man is dead; but he cannot fall, so many spears whose shafts rest on the ground are sticking in his breast.' With gentle hands for so rough a warrior he drew some of them out, and let the body of the stalwart hero sink down beside Ammata.

"Our horsemen fled as soon as they saw us fall. I lay like one dead, and the pursuit dashed past me. After a long time, when all had become quiet, I succeeded in raising myself a little. So the king found me beside Ammata, whose fate and that of Thrasaric I related to him. As for the rest—how he lost the moment of victory; yes, threw away the victory already gained—you know as well—"

"We know all that," said Hilda, dejectedly.

"And where is Ammata—where is Thrasaric buried?" inquired Gibamund.

"Close by Decimum, in two hills. The land belongs to a colonist. According to the custom of our ancestors, three projecting spears were planted in each hill. Then the king's followers placed me on a horse which brought me here in the lamentable retreat. Fie upon this Vandal people, that suffers its princes and nobles to fight and bleed alone! What have the masses yet effected, except a headlong and disgraceful flight?"

XXXII.

THE dim gray of early dawn was just beginning to displace the darkness in the furthest east, although overhead the stars still sparkled in the sky, when there glided through the streets of the camp, with swift but noiseless steps, a delicate, girlish figure.

The shaggy dogs that watched the tents of their masters growled slightly, but did not bark. A Vandal who stood on guard at the corner of one of the streets started, superstitiously crossed himself, and attempted by a wide circuit to avoid the approaching white figure. But the latter came right up to him.

"Where is Decimum—I mean in which direction?" she asked in low, quickly-uttered words.

“To the east—yonder!” and he pointed with his spear.

“How far is it?”

“How far? Oh, a long distance! We rode as fast as our horses could carry us, urged on by fear—I scarcely know of what—and did not draw rein until we arrived here. It took us six—eight hours.”

“No matter!”

The hurrying form soon reached the exit of the camp. The guards let her pass out unchallenged. But one called after her, “Which way? Not that! The enemy is there!”

“Do not remain long,” added a Moor. “The evil wind is rising.” But she was already out of hearing. As soon as she was beyond the camp, she sought to avoid the road marked by the tracks of men and horses, and also by lost and discarded weapons—if this line through the desert could be called a road. She turned, therefore, aside from the path a few hundred paces to the south, towards the interior of the desert, in so doing climbing over several high, dune-like hills of sand.

After she believed herself sufficiently distant from the road to be no longer visible from it, she turned again in her original direction towards the east, or what she supposed to be the east. For

the sun, that for a time had risen, like a ball of glowing fire, eclipsing the light of the stars and pointing out the way, had soon disappeared behind a vaporous veil, the exhalation of the desert.

And now with all her strength she hurried on. There was no mark to guide her way, no tree, no bush; only the sky above and the sand below. Sometimes this sank into valleys, sometimes it rose in hills, but these were all monotonously alike in formation and appearance.

"If I can only reach his grave," she thought; "only reach his grave!"

How still it was! Save for her swiftly-moving form it might have been merely a pictured world. Once only she thought she saw, far to her left, in the direction of the "road," shadows like those cast by scudding clouds; possibly, instead of shadows, they might be ostriches or antelopes. But no; it seemed to her that she heard human voices, then the tones of some one calling. It was far, far away; but the voice seemed to cry, "Eugenia!"

She cowered in anxiety close to the sand-hill beside her. So from the left she could not be seen, even if the valley in which she was hiding was visible from some elevation. "Eugenia!" The word came now more distinctly; it sounded

like Hilda's voice. Soon, however, the tones grew fainter, mournfully, hopelessly dying away in the distance. Then again all was still. She sprang up and began anew her breathless running.

It troubled her that she no longer had any means of determining the direction in which she was going. Suppose she was not keeping a straight course? Then it occurred to her to look back. The track of every one of her light footsteps was imprinted clearly on the sand, and the line was straight. She was rejoiced at her sagacity. And now she looked back often—every hundred paces—to make sure that there was no deviation.

Only forward, forward! She was growing anxious. The perspiration was dripping from her forehead, from her bare arms—it had grown so hot and sultry, and the sky above was like lead. But soon a low, hot wind sprang up from the south.

She looked around again. Oh, horror! She no longer saw any trace of her footprints! The whole stretch of sand lay as smooth behind her as if she were just setting out on her journey. In amazement she stamped her foot upon the ground; the impress was effaced almost instantly by the particles of fine sand which flew along before the gentle wind.

This frightened her. She pressed her hand against her loudly beating heart. When she drew it back, the palm was half full of sand, for a coating of fine-grained sand had covered her clothing, her hair, and even her face. Through her bewildered brain flashed the remembrance that she had heard how men, camels, whole caravans, had been covered over by such sand-drifts, and how the sand, heaped together by the wind, often rose like a monstrous wave and buried beneath it with infallible certainty whatever life it swept over. She fancied that on her right, to the south, she saw such a wave forming and rolling rapidly forward to obstruct the way. Therefore she must run more quickly to escape it, for as yet the course was clear. But suddenly there came from one side a stronger puff of wind, that snatched from her head her hat of intertwined bast and whirled it along toward the north. Almost before she could recover from her surprise it had disappeared from sight. To regain it was impossible. Besides, she must hasten on towards the east—forwards! on! on!

The wind grew stronger and stronger. The sun, mounting higher and breaking its way through the haze, poured its burning rays upon her unprotected head, her dark brown hair fluttered wildly

about her ; it hurt her when, all crusted over with salt, it struck her on the cheeks. Nor was it easy for her to keep her eyes open, for the fine stinging sand kept forcing its way through the long lashes. Farther ! The sand filled her shoes, and the band of the left one broke above the instep. She took the shoe up: the wind swept it from her hand and whirled it away.

Under the circumstances it was no great loss, but she burst into tears, weeping at her helplessness. She sank upon her knees, and softly, stealthily, the insidious sand piled itself up about her. Just then she heard a shrill, harrowing cry of fear—the first sound that had come to her ears in that vast solitude for many hours,—and a dark object sped across the desert before her, from south to north. It was an ostrich, fleeing in deadly terror before the baleful wind. With its head and long white neck stretched out before it, and hastening with the sweep of its wings the pace of its swift feet, it darted away like an arrow.

“ This creature puts forth all its might in order to save its life. ‘ Shall I allow my strength to fail, I who am hastening to him I love ? ‘ Shame upon you, little one ! ’ he would say.” And she smiled through her tears, staggered to her feet, and ran on once more. And so it went on for an hour—for many hours.

Often it occurred to her that she must have erred in her course, or else she would long since have reached the battle-field. The wind had grown into a storm. Her heart throbbed as if it would burst. She became giddy, she fell—she felt that she must rest. No Vandal now could overtake her and keep her by force from her cherished purpose.

Right beside her she saw something white sticking out of the sand. It was the first thing for hours that had broken the monotonous yellowness of the ground. It was not a stone, so she reached down to take it up; but oh!—a cry of horror, of despairing helplessness, broke from her—it was her own shoe, which she had lost so long before! After all her efforts, then, she had been running round in a circle! Or had the wind carried the shoe far beyond the place where she had lost it? Not so; for as with a burst of tears she threw it from her, it was filled with sand before the wind could bear it off. With all her strength exhausted, she stood upon the very spot where she had been hours before.

To die—now! To abandon further effort—to rest—to sleep! To the wearied one it seemed that would be sweet. But no! To him! How did it run? ‘And her love was so great that it drew her into the grave of her dead hero.’ To him!”

She rose with a great effort, for she had become very weak. But almost instantly a fierce blast of wind hurled her again to the ground. Once more she struggled to her feet; she wished to look whether some human being, some house, or even the road might not be visible. Right before her to the north was a sand-hill higher than any which she had yet seen—rising perhaps a hundred feet. If she could succeed in climbing this, she would obtain from its summit a wide outlook. With indescribable efforts, for at almost every step she sank knee-deep in the loose sand until her foot reached the older and coarser structure beneath, she worked her way up, often, when she stumbled, slipping back several steps. And the worst, the most disquieting feature of her progress was that at every such movement the whole sand-hill seemed to tremble, to crumble and give way on all sides. This at first startled her and caused her to stop; she thought perhaps the whole mass would sink down and bury her. But she overcame her fears and crawled up towards the last on her knees, for she could no longer stand. The wind, which had now become a hurricane, actually helped her—it blew so strongly from the south in the direction she was going. The journey seemed to her longer than all the way before, but at last

she reached the top. She opened her eyes, which she had for some time kept closed, and—oh, joy!—before her, at a great distance, it is true, but still distinctly visible, was a strip of blue—that was the sea! And on one side, to the east, she thought she could distinguish houses and trees—surely that was Decimum! And somewhat farther inland there rose a dark hill—that was the end of the desert! She believed—but of course it was impossible to see so far—she believed or fancied that she saw on the top of the hill three thin, black, upright lines, clearly defined against the horizon—these must be the spears above his grave. “My beloved! my hero!” she cried, “I am coming.”

With outstretched arms she started down the northern side of the sand-hill. But at the first step the treacherous surface yielded, and she sank in up to her knees, then deeper, to her waist. With her last remaining strength she thrust out both her arms and plunged her hands down in the sand, striving to extricate herself, while her great antelope-like eyes looked up imploringly—ah, so despairingly!—to the silent blue heaven above. One more effort she made, still wilder and more violent; then the whole mountain of sand, disturbed by her struggles and shoved forward by

the hurricane, plunging over to the north, fell upon her, burying her in its depths and smothering her in an instant.

And over the lofty mound it had heaped upon her, the desert storm swept on, exulting and triumphant.

Many years had passed, and the grave of the devoted wife lay undisturbed, until one stormy night the wind, that ever-changing architect, swept away the sand-hill.

There came one day a pious hermit who obtained from the charitable in Decimum the scanty subsistence that he needed, and bore it to his sand-cave in the desert. He had often before passed this way, but it was only on the preceding day that the storm had laid bare the skeleton.

The old man stopped thoughtfully before it.

The bones, bleached dazzlingly white, were as fine and delicate as if fashioned by an artist's hand. The clothing, like the flesh, had long before been completely destroyed by the infiltrating moisture; but the high sand-mound had faithfully kept its secret trust, preserving unchanged for a human generation the contour of the figure, just as it was buried within its depths. It was evident that the unfortunate one had endeavored with her

right hand to protect her eyes and mouth from the sand which pressed upon them, her left hand lay upon her breast, her face was turned towards the ground.

“Who were you, poor creature?” said the holy man, deeply moved, “that found here so lonely an end? For nowhere is there any trace of a companion. A child, no doubt, or a maiden not yet fully matured! But at all events a Christian—not a Moor; for here, hanging from the neck by a silver chain, is a golden cross. And there, beside it, is a singular ornament, a half-circlet of bronze with characters engraved upon it—not Latin, not Greek, not Hebrew. No matter! The maiden’s bones shall not be scattered over the desert. The Christian shall rest in consecrated ground. The peasants must help me to bury her.” So saying, he went on towards Decimum.

All traces of the fight with the Vandals had long since disappeared. The children who at that time had been carried off by the villagers in their flight were now grown up, and were the owners of the houses and fields.

The peasant to whom the hermit related his pathetic discovery listened attentively. But when he heard of the bronze half-ring with the strange characters upon it, he interrupted the speaker and

said : "Strange ! In the tomb in the hill before our village—the hill is my property, and bears grapes upon its southern slope—there lies a young Vandal prince who fell here,—my father helped bury him ; and beside him rests a mighty warrior, a terrible giant, who is said to have fought heroically in defence of the prince. The priests say that he was a monster, a god of the thunder, one of the old heathen deities of the barbarians, at whose fall their good fortune deserted them. Now this giant has just such a bronze half-ring on his arm as you describe. Perhaps the two belong together ; who knows ? We cannot dig a grave in the desert ; the wind would blow it away. Come, I will drive out with my wagon, and we will bring back the bones of the dead and place them beside the giant ; his grave has been blessed by the priests." And so it was done.

After they had placed the small figure beside the larger one in the tomb, and the monk had uttered a half-whispered prayer, he said : " I saw, my friend, with pleased surprise that you have left upon the dead all the decorations he wore. And that you have taken so much trouble with the remains of the poor girl, that also is not exactly—"

"The custom of the peasants, you think. You

are right, holy father. But King Gelimer, who once ruled here, solemnly enjoined upon my father, after the battle, the care of these graves. He was to watch over them, as a sacred trust, until he, Gelimer, should come again and remove the bodies to Carthage. King Gelimer never returned to Decimum. But my father, when dying, charged upon me the protection of the graves; and so shall I enjoin it before my death upon my boy here, who helped us at the burial to-day. For King Gelimer was good to all, even to us Romans, and in the Vandal times he conferred many favors upon my father. Many now say he was not a man, but a demon—an evil one, some think; but in the opinion of most of us, a good one. But-demon or man, he certainly was good, for my father often spoke in his praise."

XXXIII.

TO CETHEGUS FROM PROCOPIUS.

IT is not yet three months since we left Byzantium, and I am writing this—really and truly!—in Carthage, at the Capitol, in the palace of the Asdings, in the hall of arms of the terrible Geiseric. I sometimes almost doubt the fact myself, yet it is certainly true!

On the day after the fight at Decimum our infantry came up, and the whole army advanced to Carthage, which we reached about evening.

We chose a place for a camp outside of the city, although no one attempted to prevent our entrance. On the contrary, the Carthaginians had opened all their gates, and everywhere along the streets and in the public places had lighted torches and lanterns. The whole night these fires of rejoicing and welcome burned brightly throughout the city, while the few Vandals who had not fled sought asylum in the Catholic churches.

But Belisarius forbade positively that the city should be entered in the night; he feared some ambuscade or military ruse. He could not believe that Geiseric's capital would fall into his hands without further contest.

On the following day our ships, borne along by a favorable south wind, sailed around the promontory of Mercury. As soon as the Carthaginians espied our flag, they removed the iron barring-chains from their outer harbor, Mandracium, and made signs to our sailors that they might enter. This, however, our naval commander refused to do, mindful of Belisarius's warning; so the fleet anchored in the Bay of Stagnum, five miles from this city, awaiting further instructions.

But in order that the worthy citizens of Carthage might on the first day become acquainted with their liberators, a ship-master, Kalonymos, landed at Mandracium with some sailors—contrary to the directions of Belisarius and the quæstor—and plundered all the merchants, foreigners as well as Carthaginians, who have their store-houses and residences at that place. He took all the money, all the merchandise, and even the handsome candelabra and lanterns which the inhabitants had lighted up to express their joy at our coming.

We had hoped—Belisarius gave orders to look to it carefully—to set free the captive king Hilderic and his nephew. But this hope remains unfulfilled. In the royal castle, high above on the Capitol, is the gloomy dungeon in which the usurper kept these Asdings imprisoned. He seemed to adopt this course with all his enemies; his predecessors, on the other hand, preferred the executioner to the jailor. He also held confined here many of our merchants, because he feared that if they should sail away, they would convey to us all sorts of useful information. That this opinion was not without good grounds is shown in the case of my Hegelochos, whom Belisarius sent back to-day to Syracuse, richly rewarded.

When the head-jailer, a Roman, learned of our victory at Decimum, and saw our ships coming round the promontory, he liberated all these prisoners. He would have brought out the king and Euages also, but their cell was empty. No one knows what has become of them.

At noon Belisarius commanded the crews of the ships to land, and all the troops to furbish their arms and look their best. Then the whole army, in full battle array—for we were still on guard against some trickery of the Vandals—marched through the “Grove of the Empress Theodora,” as the thankful Carthaginians, I understand, have christened it anew, then through the southern gate into the lower city.

Belisarius and his chief lieutenants ascended with a select body of troops to the Capitol, and our general ceremoniously took his place on the purple and gold-adorned throne of Geiseric.

Belisarius caused the midday meal to be served in the banquet-hall where Gelimer was accustomed to entertain the nobles of the Vandals. The saloon is called “Delphica,” because a magnificent and artistically wrought tripod forms its chief decoration. Here Belisarius acted as host to the leaders of the army, on the very spot where, on the day before, the meal was being prepared for

Gelimer. Thus we feasted on the viands intended for the celebration of his victory, and, seasoned by such thoughts, we found them excellent. The servants of Gelimer brought in the dishes, filled the cups with fragrant Grassiker, and served us in all things. Here again we see how the fickle goddess delights in sporting with the changing fortunes of men.

You, O Cethegus!—I know it well—think differently in regard to the ultimate causes of events. You see the rigid necessity of law regulating the actions of men, as well as the sunshine and the storm. That may be magnificent, it may be heroic, but it is terrible. I am a modest spirit, quite the opposite of a hero, and I cannot endure such thoughts. I waver doubtfully between two opinions. At times I can see only the capricious rule of blind chance, rejoicing alternately to build up and to destroy. Then, again, I believe that an inscrutable God directs all things, reaching down out of the clouds to accomplish his mysterious aims. But I have altogether given up philosophizing and am satisfied simply to watch the varying panorama of events, not without contempt and ridicule for the follies of other mortals, and for those of Procopius also.

And yet I do not wish to break away entirely

from belief in Christianity. One does not know whether on the last day the Son of man will not really come in the clouds of heaven. In this case I should much rather be placed among the sheep than the goats.

The people, the liberated Romans, the Catholics, in their joy over their deliverance, see everywhere signs and miracles. They look upon our Huns as angels from heaven. They will soon learn to appreciate these angels more justly, especially if they have handsome wives and daughters or full money-chests. With all due respect to his majesty the emperor, I must say that most of our soldiers (Belisarius's body-guard excepted) are as disreputable a rabble as could be got together from all the provinces of the empire, and from the adjacent barbarian nations, not less ready to steal, to rob, and to murder than they are to fight. And yet, in consequence of the boundless good fortune that has attended us in this whole undertaking, we—pickpockets and cut-throats that we are!—actually begin to believe that we are the chosen favorites, the holy instruments of the Lord. Thus the whole army believes, heathens as well as Christians, that the spring in the desert gushed forth for us miraculously, by God's command. So also both our

soldiers and the Carthaginians place faith in a so-called "miracle of the lamps," an account of which I will give you.

The greatest saint of the Carthaginians is St. Cyprian, who has more than half a dozen basilicas and chapels, in all of which his holy-days are ostentatiously celebrated. But the Vandals took away almost all the churches from the Catholics and turned them over to the Arians. Among these was the great Basilica of St. Cyprian, down by the harbor, out of which they drove the Catholic priests with contempt and abuse. The loss of this cathedral caused the deepest grief to the orthodox believers. It is stated that St. Cyprian repeatedly appeared to the pious in their dreams, comforting them and announcing that he would ultimately avenge himself on the Vandals for the injury they had done him. I consider that not altogether praiseworthy in the great saint; we poor sinners on the earth are taught that we must forgive our enemies, and yet the angry saint above can wreak his revengeful anger and still remain the holy Cyprian! The pious, strengthened and justified in their desire for revenge by the sentiments of their most cherished saint, waited for a long time eagerly and anxiously to see what blow St. Cyprian would strike against the heretics.

Within the last few days it became manifest. The "great Cyprianic festival" was at hand ; it occurred upon the day after the fight at Decimum. The Arian priests had on the very day of the battle decorated the church most magnificently, and had arranged many thousands of small lamps to produce by night a brilliant illumination in honor of their expected victory. At the written command of the Archdeacon Verus—he had himself accompanied the king into the field—all the rich vessels and treasures of the church were brought forth from secret places of deposit, known only to Verus, and placed upon the seven altars of the basilica. Never would these undreamed-of treasures have been found in the vaults of the church had not Verus sent the directions and the keys. It happened, however, that we, not the Vandals, were the victors at Decimum. Upon receipt of this news the Arian priests fled headlong from the city. The Catholics poured into the basilica, discovered the treasures of the heretics, and lighted the heterodox lamps to celebrate the orthodox victory. "This is the revenge of St. Cyprian ! This is the miracle of the lamps !" Thus they howl through the streets, and cuff and thump every doubter until he believes it too and joins them in the cry : "Yes, indeed, this is the revenge and the lamp-miracle of St. Cyprian !"

Now I have no objection whatever to a genuine miracle. On the contrary, I am delighted when something occurs which the all-explaining philosophers, who have tormented me so long, cannot explain. But it must be an actual, an indisputable miracle. This affair, however, is by no means inexplicable under the natural order of things. How, then, can it be a miracle at all? Belisarius undertook to reprove me for my sceptical derision, but I merely replied that St. Cyprian appears to be the patron-saint of lamp-lighters, and I do not belong to the craft.

Fara the Herulian obtained the handsomest piece of booty at Decimum. He received, it is true, from the nobleman a rough spear-thrust through his brazen shield into his arm. But the shield did its duty well, and the spear-point did not penetrate very far into the flesh. When he went up to the adjacent villa and was about to burst open the door, suddenly it was opened from within, and a wonderfully beautiful woman, richly adorned with jewels and with deep-red flowers in her black hair, advanced to meet him. She held out to him a wreath of laurel and pomegranate leaves.

"Whom have you been expecting?" asked the astonished Herulian.

"The victor," the fascinating creature answered. A tolerably oracular response! This sphinx would, without doubt, just as willingly have given her wreath and herself to the Vandals, if they had been successful. And, in fact, what matters it to a Carthaginian woman whether Vandals or Byzantines conquer? She is the prey of the stronger, of the conqueror—perhaps, indeed, to his destruction. But I fancy this time the sphinx has found her *Œdipus*. If one of this singularly matched pair is destined to come to grief, it is hardly likely to be my friend Fara. He sets some value upon me because I can read and write—and so he introduced me to her. Evidently he had boasted considerably about me, but the result was scarcely flattering. She surveyed me from head to foot and from foot to head—no very long task, for I am not tall—and, with a contemptuous curl of her full, voluptuous lips, deliberately turned and walked away. I will not maintain that I am handsome, while, after Belisarius, Fara is the most personable man of us all. But it irritated me that she found the mortal part of my being so unattractive that she did not care to become acquainted with the immortal. I am provoked at her. I wish her no harm. But it would neither astonish me nor deeply grieve me if she should come to a bad end.

XXXIV.

BELISARIUS keeps the people at work day and night repairing the walls. Besides the entire army and the sailors from the fleet, he has pressed the citizens into this service. They are beginning to murmur. They supposed that we came here to free them, and now we force them to harder drudgery than Gelimer ever exacted.

The city walls in their wide circuit show so many gaps and weak places that we see now the reason why the king, after his lost battle, did not retreat to his capital. Verus, who has great influence in temporal matters also with the tyrant—for so, according to Justinian's command, we must call the champion of his people's independence—is said in the beginning to have advised the Vandals to shut themselves up in Carthage and to suffer themselves to be besieged by us. If that is so, then the priest understands—as is natural—more about lanterns than about war. On the very first night, our general thinks, we would have slipped in through some breach; especially as many thousands of Carthaginians stood ready to show us where the breaches were. And we would have caught the whole Vandal power at one stroke, as if in a mouse-trap,

while now we are compelled to seek out our enemy in the desert.

The goddess Fortune is the only woman in whom I am disposed sometimes to believe. Perhaps, too, I might add Folly. Folly and Fortune—to, you all-powerful sisters, and not to St. Cyprian, ought we to light thanksgiving lanterns! The goddess of Fortune seems never to weary of playing ball with the fate of the Vandals; but she could not do it had not Folly placed this ball in her hands.

Yesterday a small sail-boat from the north ran into the harbor. From its mast floated the blood-red Vandal flag. Pounced upon suddenly by our sentry-boats, which lay invisible behind the harbor wall, the Vandals on board were frightened almost to death. They had no suspicion whatever that their capital had fallen. They came straight from Sardinia. To send thither their fleet and the flower of their army, when our expedition had already reached Sicily—that was an act to which they could have been persuaded only by Folly. On the shipmaster was found a letter which runs as follows: “Hail to you and victory, King of the Vandals! Where now are your gloomy forebodings? Our victory is com-

plete. We landed near Karalis, the capital of Sardinia. We have taken the harbor, the city, the capitol. The traitor Goda fell by my spear; his army is either slain or captured; the whole island is once more yours. Celebrate a feast of victory, for this is but the forerunner of the great day when you will crush the insolent enemy, who, we have just heard, is really sailing towards our coast. Not one of them shall return from our Africa. Such is the message of Zaro, your faithful general and brother."

That was yesterday. And to-day another of our cruisers brought into the harbor a Vandal despatch-boat, captured on the way to Sardinia. On board was a messenger from Gelimer with the following letter: "It was not Goda that decoyed us to Sardinia, but some demon in Goda's form, a demon to whom God has granted permission to destroy us. You did not set forth that we might reconquer Sardinia, but that our enemies might win from us Africa. That was the will of Heaven when it ordained your voyage. Scarcely had you sailed, when Belisarius landed. His army is small, but heroism and fortune have alike abandoned our people. Our nation has no guiding star, its king no judgment. The vehemence of one or the weak heart of another ruins

even well-devised plans. Ammata, the darling of us all, has fallen, the faithful Thrasaric has fallen, Gibamund has been wounded, our army badly defeated at Decimum. Our ship-yards, our ports, our armories, are in the enemy's hands. Carthage itself is theirs. But the Vandals whom I still hold together are dazed by this first disaster; they cannot be roused, although everything is at stake. The short-lived impulse to action has died out in almost all of them. It is shameful to say that more fitness for war than in the whole of our disheartened army exists at the present time in the twelve thousand Moorish mercenaries whom I have enlisted at great cost and have placed as a reserve in a strong camp at Bulla. If these also should fail me, then all would be at an end. Our only hope now rests in you and your return. Never mind Sardinia and the punishment of the rebel; hasten hither with your whole fleet. But, of course, do not land near Carthage, but far to the west, somewhere about the boundary line between Mauretania and Numidia. Let us together avert the threatened ruin or share it in common.

GELIMER."

The despatches of the brothers cross each other, and both fall into our hands! The king will wait for his fleet in vain in the west! And

now, fair goddess Fortune, inflate your cheeks, blow in the sails of the Vandal ships, and bring them all in good shape, together with their victorious army, here into the harbor of Carthage—right into our clutches!

The goddess Fortune is also a woman like the rest. Suddenly she turns her back to us—at least a little—and makes eyes at the blond-heads. I have a good mind to renew my allegiance to the saint of the lamps.

The tyrant is gaining ground. How? Through his amiability and goodness of heart, the people say. He is winning over the country-people; not the Moors, but—hear it and help us, St. Cyprian!—the Romans, the Catholics. He is drawing them away from us to his side. He maintains strict discipline, while our Huns rob, pillage, and steal, except when in the presence of Belisarius—or when they are asleep: but even then, I fancy, they dream about plundering. And so the liberated peasants flee in troops before their liberators and into the camp of the barbarian king, preferring the Vandals to the Huns. They conspire together, attack our scattered heroes while pillaging,—mostly camp-followers, it is true,—cut off the heathen, yes, in some cases, even orthodox

heads and exchange them with the tyrant for a heretic gold-piece. That perhaps in itself would not be so very bad, but the peasants serve the Vandal as spies and informers; they betray to him all that he wishes to know, provided, of course, they know it themselves. No doubt his goodness of heart is all hypocrisy. But it helps, better perhaps than if it were genuine.

I am almost sorry for her, the sphinx. She was so wondrously beautiful! What a pity it was, though, that she did not take the form of some beast, rather than that of a woman! Fara found out that she was disposed to look with favor also upon Althias, the Thracian, and Aigan, the Hun. In the beginning the three heroes came near fighting to the death for the possession of this marvellous creature. But this time the Hun was wiser than the German and the Thracian. At his proposition they decided to share the woman equally between them in brotherly fashion, so they strapped her upon a board and with a couple of strokes with an axe divided her into three pieces. Fara received the head, as was reasonable, for he had the most right to her. For when she perceived that he suspected her, she sought to appease him with a choice speci-

men of fruit, which she picked fresh from a tree. But she had overlooked the fact that Fara, the Herulian and heathen, is much fonder of horse-flesh than of peaches. He gave the fruit to her monkey ; it bit into it, shook itself, and fell over dead. That vexed the German. And he did not rest until he had brought to light all the riddles of this many-sided sphinx, including her natural and inherent faithlessness. Then they divided, as I have said, her beautiful form into three parts. I advised them to bury the body right deep ; otherwise flames might flash forth at night from her grave.

A slight rebuff.

Belisarius complained that he knew too little about the enemy. So he sent out one of his best guardsmen, Diogenes, to the southwest with a small force to obtain news.

They passed the night in a village. The peasants swore that there were no Vandals within two days' march. Our soldiers slept in the best house, in the upper story. To be sure, before retiring they had spent some time below the ground-floor—that is, in the cellar. They did not station guards. Why should they ? Are they not the liberators of the peasants ? That our heroes drank up all the villagers' wine, slaugh-

tered their cattle, insulted their wives, has no bearing on the subject. It is for such things peasants are made.

Soon all were snoring ; Diogenes louder than the rest. The night passed on. Then from the immediate neighborhood the peasants brought the Vandals, who surrounded the house. But the holy Cyprian is stronger than the soundest drunken sleep. He caused a sword to fall upon a metal shield below, and awoke—now that *is* a miracle which I can believe in, for no mortal man could have done it—and awoke thereby one of the sleepers. Under cover of the night most of our men succeeded in escaping. Diogenes himself came back with three wounds in his throat and face, without the little finger of his sword-hand, and without any useful intelligence.

The goddess Fortune is blowing the wrong way. The Vandal fleet has not yet sailed into Carthage and into our skilfully-set trap.

The tyrant seems to have aroused his army from its stupor. Our advance-posts, horsemen whom we sent out around the city, bring the news that “vast clouds of dust are rising from the southwest. Nothing less than an approaching army can be concealed therein,” they say.

No Zaro. Has life, in spite of the capture of that letter, gotten wind of the true situation and chosen another landing-place?

Without doubt the Vandals are hidden behind yonder clouds of dust. Our Herulians have caught a couple of peasants—we are already so well known in the nearly freed Africa that the peasants have to be caught by their deliverers, in case we wish to get sight of them. They seek refuge from freedom with the barbarians! The prisoners say that the king is in full march against us. He caused a Vandal noble who had kidnapped the wife of a colonist to be hanged at the door of the colonist's house, and the shield-bearer of this same noble, who had stolen three of the colonist's geese, to be hanged on the stable door, not far from his master. Singular, isn't it? But this seems to please the peasants. "Compensating justice," Aristotle calls it. And this wonderful Vandal hero is said to have paid not less attention to philosophy than to spear-casting.

Belisarius has urgently appealed to Byzantium for the pay long since due the Huns. These are getting troublesome. It is now six months since we left Byzantium—it is December. Storms rage from the desert over Carthage and out upon the gray sea, which has lost its beautiful blue color,

The Huns threaten to leave our service. They excuse their pillaging because the citizens of Carthage and the peasants alike refuse to give credit either to them or to the emperor. They cannot pay, they say, with the money due them, since it remains at Byzantium. To-day a ship came from the imperial city. It brought not a solidus in money, but about thirty tax-collectors and the command to transmit the first taxes from the conquered province.

If King Gelimer hangs people, so do we. But we hang—Romans, not Vandals. The ill-will towards us is no longer confined to the peasants; it is brewing here in Carthage under our very eyes. The humbler classes, especially the artisans and small shop-keepers, whom the rule of the barbarians did not press upon so heavily as upon the rich senators, are becoming disaffected. A conspiracy has been discovered. Gelimer's army is posted not far from the western, or Numidian, gate. His horsemen ride up by night as far as the walls of the suburb Atlas. The plot was to let in the Vandals at night through the unfinished walls of the lower city. Belisarius had Laurus and Victor, two Carthaginian citizens, convicted of taking part in this conspiracy, hanged upon a

hill in front of the Numidian gate. Our general likes to set up his gallows upon a hill. His administration of justice can be seen from afar, swinging in the wind. But Belisarius does not dare, while the citizens are in this humor, to leave the city exposed and to lead out the army. At least the walls must be finished first. The citizens are now compelled to work at them night and day; and this displeases them greatly.

Still no Zaro! And the Huns are in almost open mutiny. They declare they will not fight in the next battle; they would get no pay for it anyhow, and they have been enticed here over the sea contrary to the terms of their enlistment. Besides, they fear that after the conquest of the Vandals they will be left here as a garrison and will never again see their homes. Belisarius has been looking around for a suitable hill. But he has as yet found none that is big enough. There are too many of the Huns, and we others are—on the whole—too few. Besides, we reckon them among our best soldiers. Consequently, our general, who only yesterday wrote out an order for the hanging of their leaders, to-day invited them all to his table. That is the greatest pleasure and honor that can be conferred upon them—

a less one for us old comrades of Belisarius! He praised them and proposed their health. Then in a short time they were all drunk and perfectly satisfied.

They have slept it off, and now again they are more discontented than before—and still thirstier. Wine there is in plenty. But for the last three hours no water. The Vandals have broken down the great aqueduct before the Numidian gate. The Huns can do without water—easily enough!—but not we, nor the horses, the camels and the Carthaginians. The king, therefore, forces matters to a decision, to a battle. He cannot reduce the city by a siege, since we command the sea. Nor can he any longer take it by storm, for at last the fortifications are completed in accordance with the plans of Belisarius. He seeks, therefore, a contest in the open field. His comb—or that of his “dazed army”—must have stiffened wonderfully since that desponding letter.

Belisarius has no choice; early to-morrow he will lead us out against the enemy. He is anxious about the Huns and fears they have some evil design. He has commissioned Fara to keep his eyes sharply upon them. As the fate of the battle vacillates, the Huns will vacillate with it. And

we are likely to see in front a fight between Byzantines and Vandals, and in the rear a fight between Herulians and Huns. That might prove interesting! But it is just this anxiety, this charm of danger, that attracts me into Belisarius's service.. Better a Vandal dart in my head than the philosophy over which I have studied myself sick.—Well, then, to-morrow!

CHAPTER XXXV.

ON the following day Belisarius, having first once more inspected the new fortifications of Carthage and having decided that they would be sufficient, in case of a reverse, to protect his army and defy a siege, sent forth from the gates against the enemy all the cavalry except five hundred picked Illyrians. To the Thracian Althias he assigned the select troop of shield-bearers and the imperial standard; he was not to decline a fight with the Vandal outposts, but rather to bring it on.

The general himself followed on the next day with the infantry and the five hundred Illyrian cavalry. Only the guards that were indispensable for the gates, towers, and walls remained behind.

At Tricameron, about seventeen Roman miles

west of Carthage, Althias came upon the enemy. The foremost ranks of both parties exchanged a few darts, and returned with the announcement to their respective armies. The Byzantines encamped where they stood, and not far from them burned the countless watch-fires of the Vandals. Between the two armies ran a small brook. The entire region was flat and unwooded. Only upon the left wing of the Romans, and very close to the brook, a hill of moderate height rose out of the sand.

Without waiting for the command or the permission of Althias, as soon as he heard that the camp would be pitched here and the battle fought on the next day, Aigan, the chief leader of the Huns, sprang forward to the hill. He was followed at once by the whole swarm of his countrymen. Then they sent word to Althias that the Huns would encamp there for the night, and would take their position for the battle in the morning. Althias took care not to forbid what he could not prevent without bloodshed. But the hill commanded the whole region.

Later in the night the leaders of the Huns conferred together upon the summit.

"No spy about?" asked Aigan. "This prince of the Heruli does not withdraw from our neighborhood."

"I did what you directed. Seventy Huns lie on the watch in a circle around our position. Not even a bird can fly over them unnoticed."

"What are we to do to-morrow?" asked the third, leaning on the shoulder of his horse and stroking his shaggy mane. "I place no further trust in the words of Belisarius. He is deceiving us."

"Belisarius does not deceive us. His master deceives him."

"I saw," began the second anxiously, "a singular sign. Just as it grew completely dark, there flashed forth blue flames from the spear-points of the Romans. What can that signify?"

"That signifies victory," answered the third Hun, considerably agitated. "One of my ancestors saw it himself—and the story has been handed down from generation to generation—on the night before the fearful battle in Gaul, when the scourge of great Atta was broken."

"Atta in the clouds, great Atta, be propitious to us!" whispered all three, bending low towards the east.

"My ancestor stood on guard there, on that dark night, beside the rushing river. On the other side two men rode up, examining the ground, their spears across the shoulder. My

ancestor and his companions glided into the tall rushes and drew their bows that never failed. They took good aim."

"“See, Ætius,” exclaimed one, “your spear is tipped with flame!”

"“And yours also, king of the Visigoths!” replied the other.

"Our ancestors looked up, and truly a pale-blue flame was playing around the spear-heads of their adversaries. Then our people fled in terror, not daring to shoot against those whom the gods were protecting. And on the next day Atta was—"

"Atta, Atta, be not angry with us!" they cried again with trembling voices, as they gazed up at the clouds.

"What at that time betokened victory for the Germans and disaster to their foes," said Aigan, mistrustfully, "may now again signify the same thing. We will await the issue. To whichever side the victory inclines, we will incline too. For this reason I have selected this hill for our position. From here we can clearly see the course of the battle. Either straight down across the brook upon the left wing of the Vandals—"

"Or to the right upon the Roman centre—like a whirlwind!"

"I should prefer to plunder the Vandal camp. It is said to be full of yellow gold."

"And handsome women."

"But there is still more gold in Carthage than the Vandal king has in his tents."

"The best of it is that the result will probably be decided before the Byzantine lion comes up."

"You are right. I should not like to spur my horse against the flash of his angry eye."

"Patience! Wait quietly. In whichever direction I shoot my arrow, thither we will charge. And Atta will hover in the air above his children!" He took off his thick, black woollen cap, threw it in the air and softly sang:

"Atta, Atta, give us booty,
Booty for thy faithful children—
Yellow gold and shining silver,
And the red blood of the vintage,
And our foemen's fairest women."

All with uncovered heads repeated these words reverently and with deep fervor. Then Aigan put on again his helmet-like cap, and without further parley they separated.

XXXVI.

IN the camp of the Vandals, on the left bank of the brook, the great banner of Geiseric floated

above the royal tent, its folds gently rising and falling in the night-wind. In a somewhat smaller tent, on one side, Gibamund and Hilda sat, hand in hand, upon a couch, the table before them covered with Gibamund's armor and weapons. The lamp hanging down from above cast a feeble light which was reflected from the bright metal. By the side of these polished arms lay a small black leather case, containing a dagger with a handsome handle of curious workmanship.

"It has been hard for me," said Gibamund, springing up impatiently, "to submit to the king's orders and to assume the command to-day in the camp until his return. The anxiety, the suspense, is too great."

"Suppose the Moors should fail us! How many are there, did you say?"

"Twelve thousand. They ought to have been here day before yesterday, had they hastened forward, according to agreement, from Bulla. In vain did the king send messenger after messenger to hurry their advance. Finally, full of impatience, he went out himself along the Numidian road to meet them. For if the twelve thousand infantry fail us to-morrow—they are to form our entire left wing—then our position here will be untenable. Hark! that is the horn of the camp-

watch! The king must have returned. I will inquire."

But already steps and the clatter of arms were heard approaching. Both Gibamund and Hilda sprang up and hastened to the entrance of the tent. The curtains were thrust aside from without, and before them, his massive helmet on his head, stood—Zaro.

"You, brother?"

"You back, Zaro! Oh, now all is well!"

More earnest, more self-controlled than ever before, but manly and undaunted, the strong man stood between the two, clasped them both to his breast, and pressed their hands. It was a joy, a comfort to them simply to look at this loyal, steadfast brother.

"Not all is well, dear sister-in-law," he replied solemnly. "Ah, Ammata! And that whole day at Decimum! I do not understand it," he said, with a shake of his head; "but much can yet be remedied."

"How is it that you come so unexpectedly? Have you seen Gelimer?"

"He will be here soon. He promised me. He—is praying in his tent—with Verus."

"You come from—"

"Sardinia—by the shortest course. A letter of

the king forwarded by Verus, summoning me to a swift return and warning me not to land at Carthage, miscarried. But a second letter, sent by my brother himself, reached me with the full disastrous news. I landed at the place appointed, and proceeded to Bulla to take command of the Moorish mercenaries and lead them here. I arrived at Bulla and found—" He stamped with his foot angrily upon the ground.

"Well, what?"

"An empty camp."

"The Moors, then, were already on the way hither?"

"They had dispersed. The whole twelve thousand had returned into the desert."

"What?"

"The traitors!"

"No, not traitors. They sent back the money which the king had paid them. Cabaon, their oracular chief, has warned them, has forbidden them to take part in this contest. All followed his advice except a few hundred people from the Pappuan Mountains—"

"The guest-rite has been exchanged between them and Gelimer, and in fact the whole Asding line."

"These followed us, led by their chief Sersaon."

“That overthrows the king’s entire plan of battle for to-morrow.”

“Well,” said Zaro, quietly, “in place of the Moors he unexpectedly has been joined by the troops under my command—not the whole five thousand, but—”

“But with you at their head,” cried Gibamund.

“On the Numidian road he met, first, my messengers sent in advance, then my little army and myself. What a mournful meeting! How I had rejoiced over my victory! But now! Gelimer’s tears flowed fast as he lay on my breast. And I myself—O Ammata! But no! Now it is necessary to be strong and calm and courageous, yes, stern; for this king is much too soft-hearted.”

“Yet,” observed Gibamund, “he has recovered from the defeat at Decimum. At the time he seemed utterly crushed.”

“Yes,” muttered Hilda, “more than is permitted to a man.”

“I loved Ammata not less than he,” said Zaro with quivering lips; “but to let slip from his hands the assured victory, merely to lament for the boy, to bury him—”

“That you would not have done, my Zaro,” said a gentle voice. Gelimer had entered. He

spoke the words in a quiet tone, while the others turned round in embarrassment. "Your censure is deserved," he continued. "But I saw in his death—he was the first Vandal who fell in this war—a judgment of God. If the most innocent of us must perish, surely the punishment of God rests upon us all for the sins of our fathers."

Zaro shook his head indignantly and brought his helmet down with a loud clang upon the table. "Brother, brother, this morbid and fatal delusion can destroy you and all your people. I am not learned enough to argue with you, but I, too, am a Christian, a sincere one—no heathen, like our beautiful Hilda here; and I say to you— No, let me finish. How that fearful word of God, 'vengeance,' is to be interpreted I know not, nor does it trouble me much; but this I do know: if our kingdom is to fall, it will fall, not on account of the sins of our ancestors, but by reason of our own errors. The sins of our fathers avenge themselves of course; vice and disease are inherited. Grown effeminate themselves, they have begotten a degenerate race, they have handed down their desire for pleasure, and nourished it in their children. And in other ways, also, the iniquities of our parents are avenged on us, but without the interposition of the saints. That the Catholics, per-

secuted for so many decades, turn to the emperor; that the Ostrogoths help our enemies instead of us,—these truly are punishments for the misdeeds of our forefathers. But for these things God is not called upon to perform miracles: it would need a miracle to prevent them. And Ammata—was he blameless? In disobedience to your express command, he rushed into battle with foolhardy eagerness. And Thrasaric? Instead, conformably to a general's duty, of abandoning the unruly boy to his fate and not attacking until Gibamund had reached the position assigned him, he followed the dictates of his own heart, and sought to save the one you so passionately loved. And—" He hesitated.

"And the king," continued Gelimer, "instead of doing his duty, broke down at the sight of the dead boy. But just there falls the curse, the vengeance of the Lord."

"By no means," replied Zaro. "That also is no miracle. That also follows from the fact that you yourself, O brother—I have said it before—no longer are a genuine Vandal. You are sunk, not like the people, in vice, but in morbid subtleties. And this, too, is a consequence of the evil-doing of our fathers; for had you not, when a boy, witnessed that horrible persecution— But it does

not help us to inquire how the past wreaks punishment for its guilt upon the present; it is necessary to-day, to-morrow, and at all times, to do one's duty steadfastly, faithfully, and without unhealthy brooding. Then either we shall conquer—and that will be well,—or we shall fall as brave men—and that will not be wholly an evil. We can do no more than the duty required of us. The gracious Lord in heaven will deal with our souls in His wisdom and mercy. I do not fear for mine, if I should fall in battle for my country."

"Oh," cried Hilda, joyously, "that has done us good! That was like the fresh north wind that drives away the sultry clouds."

Sorrowfully, but without reproach, Gelimer replied: "Yes, the healthy man cannot comprehend why the sick do not stir about and make merry. I cannot help it. I must 'brood over subtleties,' as you term it. Yet," he added, with a melancholy smile, "sometimes I brood the matter out. Sometimes, in my own way, I break through the clouds. So I have now again in fervent prayer found my way to my old, strong consolation. Only Verus, my confessor, knows about these attacks, and for what reason I succeed in overcoming them. The right is on my side. I am not a usurper, as the emperor abusively calls me. The

murderous Hilderic was justly deposed. No guilt in his case attaches itself to me ; I did him no injustice, and the emperor has no wrong to avenge. That is my hold, my support, and my staff.—Ah, Verus, one never hears you enter.”

With hostile glances Zaro surveyed the priest.

“ I come to take you away, O king. There are still many written orders to be prepared. I must also remind you about the prisoners—”

“ Ah, yes ! Hear me, Zaro ; grant at length the consent I have long entreated from you. Permit me to set free Hilderic and Euages—”

“ By no means !” cried Zaro, pacing with long strides the narrow tent. “ By no means ! Least of all on the night before the decisive battle. Shall Belisarius place Hilderic again upon the throne of Carthage, after we have fallen ? Or shall he, after we have conquered, be kept continually in Byzantium, a living pretext for another attack upon us ? Off with the heads of the murderers ! Where are they ?”

“ Here in the camp and well guarded.”

“ And the hostages ?”

“ Together with the son of Pudentius, they were confined in Decimum,” answered Verus. “ After our defeat they were set free by the victors.”

"That might be repeated to-morrow," said Zaro, excitedly. "The enemy might easily, in the tumult of battle, penetrate temporarily into this open camp. I demand, king—"

"Let it be so," interrupted Gelimer. And turning to Verus, he gave the order: "Let Hilderic and Euages be removed—"

"Whither?"

"To a secure place where no Byzantine can set them free."

Verus bowed and hastily withdrew.

"I will follow you," the king called after him. "Do not be too bitter against me in your hearts," he said in gentle tones, turning to the other three, "you who are sound in soul. I am like a tree that has been cleft by lightning. But to-morrow," he added with a changed voice, "to-morrow I think you will be contented with me. Even you, exacting Hilda! Lend me your harp. You will not repent it."

Hilda brought it from a corner of the tent. "Here. But you know," she said, smiling, "its strings would break if they should be used to accompany Latin verses designed for—penitential hymns."

"They will not break. Sleep well!" And the king withdrew from the tent.

"This harp, made wholly of dark wood," said Zaro, "I think I have seen before in other hands. But where? In Ravenna, was it not?"

Hilda nodded. "My friend Teia, my instructor on the harp and in the use of weapons, presented it to me as a marriage-gift. And he has not forgotten me, noble, faithful friend! In my happiness he never communicated with me. But now—"

"Well?" asked Zaro.

"As soon as the first news of our disaster at Decimum reached Ravenna," Gibamund explained, "it was reported that I—doubtless I was confounded with Ammata—had fallen, certain valiant men of the Ostrogoths—the old master-of-arms Hildebrand, Teia, and several others wanted to come with a force of volunteers to our assistance. The queen-regent absolutely forbade it. Then Teia sent my widow, as he believed her to be, this beautiful dagger of dark bronze."

"That is rare workmanship," said Zaro, drawing the blade and examining it. "What a noble weapon!"

"He forged it himself!" exclaimed Hilda, eagerly. "See, here is the monogram of his house on the handle."

"And on the blade an adage, engraved in

runes," said Zaro, taking it close to the light of the lamp. "'The dead are free.' Hm! not over-cheerful consolation; still not too grave for Hilda. Preserve this."

"Yes," replied Hilda, calmly, "the dagger in my girdle, and the adage in my mind."

"But, Hilda, not too soon!" said Zaro, warningly, as he left the tent.

"Have no fears," she answered, throwing her arms around her husband. "It will be the widow's comfort and her weapon."

XXXVII.

THE next day at sunrise a protracted blast of horns awoke the sleeping camp of the Vandals.

Concealed from the eyes of the Romans by the outermost rows of tents, the barbarian army was marshalled within its own camp. On the evening before, written orders had been issued to the several leaders, assigning each his position. These orders were now executed without difficulty, and the people were instructed to take their breakfast of bread and wine where they stood.

The camp was very long, but narrow, following the course of the little brook. Besides the soldiers, there were in it many thousands of women,

children, and old men, who had fled from Carthage and other districts occupied or threatened by the enemy.

Another blast of horns summoned the sub-commanders and the leaders of a thousand to the midst of the camp, where, in a large and vacant space, they found the king and his two brothers on horseback. Beside them, leaning on the shoulder of her noble black steed, stood Hilda, with the shaft of an enwrapped spear in her hand. There too, mounted and in full priest's attire, was Verus. Besides the leaders there came also the soldiers with whom Zaro had reconquered Sardinia.

Still another blast of the horns rang through the streets of the camp. Then, amid enthusiastic shouts, Zaro rode a few steps forward and spoke, in a voice that was loud, clear, and resolute:

"Hear me, army of the Vandals! We fight to-day, not for victory—we fight for all that we have, the kingdom of Geiseric and its glory, your wives and children in yonder tents, who, if we succumb, are slaves. To-day it behooves us to look the enemy and to look death straight in the face. The king has commanded that this battle shall be fought by the Vandals with the sword alone—not with bows and arrows, not with javelins and spears. Here I cast my spear from me.

Do likewise, and with sword in hand fight the enemy at close quarters."

He let his lance drop, and all his troopers did the same. "Only one spear," he continued, "will be carried to-day in the Vandal army—this!"

Hilda stepped forward; he took the pole from her hand, tore the wrapping off, and swung above his head a great, waving, blood-red banner.

"Geiseric's banner! Geiseric's victorious dragon!" shouted thousands of voices.

"Follow this banner wheresoever it calls you. Let it never come into the enemy's hands! Swear to follow it until death."

"We will follow it until death!"

"Good! I have faith in you, Vandals. Now hearken to your king. You know he has a special talent for the harp and for song. He has arranged with masterly skill our order of battle; he has also composed the battle-song, that shall carry you forward and encourage you in the fight."

Gelimer threw back his long purple mantle, took up Hilda's dark triangular harp, and sang to the music of its melodious strings:

"Forward now, Vandals,
Forward to battle!
Follow the banner,
The glory-crowned banner
That leads us to victory!

"Charge on the foemen !
With breasts to their breastplates
Fight them and hurl them
Down in the conflict !

"Keep ever sacred,
Brave men of the Vandals,
The kingdom and glory
Our forefathers left us !

"Vengeance is arming
On high in the heavens.
And the right will prevail.
God gives the victory
To the just cause !"

"God gives the victory to the just cause!" repeatedly enthusiastically the Vandal warriors, as they separated and poured forth into the streets of the camp.

The king and his brothers now dismounted, to hold a last brief council and to refresh themselves with the wine which Hilda offered them.

Just as Gelimer handed the harp back to Hilda there pressed forward through the dispersing throng of soldiers a man of strange and striking appearance.

The king and his brothers gazed in astonishment on a tall figure, enveloped from the head to the ankles in a robe of camel's hair, which was

held together around the loins, not by a rope, but by a girdle formed from braids of beautiful golden-brown hair. No sandals protected his naked feet, no covering his closely-shorn head. His cheeks were sunken, and from their deep cavities looked forth a pair of fiery eyes. He threw himself at the feet of the king and lifted his hands imploringly.

"By Heaven! I know you, man," spoke Gelimer.

"Yes; that is—" began Gibamund.

"Thrasabad, Thrasaric's brother," said Zaro.

"The one who disappeared—the one so long supposed dead?" asked Hilda, coming nearer.

"Yes, Thrasabad," a hollow voice replied—"unhappy Thrasabad! I am a murderer—her murderer! King, sentence me."

Gelimer bent forward, took him by the right hand and raised him from the ground. "Not the murderer of the poor Greek! I heard the story from your brother."

"Just the same! Her blood lies on my soul. I felt that the moment I saw it gush forth. I placed my poor victim upon a horse and galloped away with her—away from the eyes of men! On—ever on into the desert—until the horse sank down exhausted. Then with these hands—not far from

here—I buried her in a sand-ravine. Her beautiful hair I cut off—how often had I stroked and caressed it! And ever since I have been mourning and praying beside her grave. Pious monks of the desert found me there at my vigils, fasting and nearly dead. I confessed to them my heavy guilt. And they promised me God's forgiveness if, as one of their number, I would make atonement from that time on by repentance and prayer at her grave. I promised. Then they gave me the dress of their order,—I fastened it together with Glauca's hair, that I might be constantly reminded of my guilt,—and brought my food for me into the lonely ravine. But when I learned of the day at Decimum and my brother's death, when the conflict drew nearer and nearer to this place, when both you and the enemy pitched your camps here, close beside my hiding-place, since—for the last two days—I have heard the war-horns of my people, I no longer find peace in solitary prayers. I had once some skill with the sword. My whole heart longed to follow the blast of the battle-horn once more—for the last time! Ah, I did not dare—I know I am not worthy of it! But last night she appeared to me in my dreams, her human beauty spiritualized into an angel's radiant glory, with no trace of earthliness about her. And she spoke: 'Go now

to your brothers-in-arms, ask for a sword, and fight and fall for your people—that is the best atonement.’ Oh, believe me, my king! I do not falsely use the name of this sainted being. If you can pardon me, for her sake—oh, let me—”

Here Zaro stepped forward, took the sword of one of his followers from its sheath, and handed it to the monk.

“Here, Thrasabad, Thrasamer’s son, I take it upon me for the king. Do you see? He has already nodded assent. Take this sword and follow me to the battle. You will not, I think, need its sheath again.—Now, King Gelimer, let the horns sound, and forward against the foe!”

XXXVIII.

THE king, with the keen eye of a general, had perceived that the decisive struggle must take place in the centre of the two armies, where, southwestwardly to the left and northeasterly to the right, rose the slight elevations on which the camps were pitched.

Besides, it had been announced by deserters from the Huns that this mercenary contingent would either take no part in the battle or, at least, would be lukewarm. Consequently Gelimer an-

anticipated no danger to his left from the right wing of the Romans.

His right flank he drew back for some distance, so that the enemy would be compelled to make a long march before they could reach it—long enough, perhaps, for the issue to be decided favorably in the centre, and the desertion and aid of the Huns thereby secured.

In the centre, therefore, the king placed the best troops of his army, almost all cavalry, with a very few foot-soldiers. Here under their general's command were the nearly five thousand veteran soldiers of Zaro ; here also Gibamund was stationed with his devoted following of about two hundred men ; here were the two Gundings with their numerous kinsmen, wearing the boar-helm and bearing, like their chiefs, boar-emblazoned shields ; here was the king himself, in the third division, with a strong force of cavalry, to which he had added the few faithful Moors from the Pappuan Mountains, under their chief Sersaon. The command of the wings he had entrusted to two other nobles. Gelimer himself, before the beginning of the contest, rode along the lines, inspecting and encouraging the soldiers.

The battle began, as the king had planned, with a complete surprise of the enemy.

While the Byzantines were busy with the preparation of their morning meal, the king led his centre from behind the sheltering rows of tents to the left bank of the brook. This stream is in itself of so little importance that the people of the vicinity give it no special name, although it never runs dry. The bank occupied by the Vandals was the higher of the two.

Belisarius had not yet come up, and his surprised lieutenants arranged their troops as well as the shortness of time admitted, each division just where it stood or was encamped. The Huns held the right wing of the Romans, occupying the hill, from which they did not move. Close to them, in conformity to the secret orders, Fara and the Herulians took their station, carefully watching their suspected allies. Next to these were posted, in the centre, Althias the Thracian, and Johannes the Armenian, with the troops of their own nationalities and also the shield-bearers and lancers of Belisarius's body-guard. Here also was the imperial standard, the "*vexillum prætorium*," the field-banner of Belisarius.

The other auxiliaries formed the left wing of the Romans, for the Byzantines also saw that the decisive contest would take place between the centres of the two armies.

As Gibamund rode forward on a white horse at the head of his followers, Hilda, mounted on her superb black stallion, accompanied him.

At her husband's wish she had protected her head by a light steel casque, above which waved the wings of the white falcon. From under this her light yellow hair streamed down freely upon her neck and over her white mantle. Gibamund had pressed upon her also a light, brightly silvered shield. Her white undergarment was girt with the black belt that held Teia's dagger, but she had declined to wear a breastplate on account of its weight. "You will not let me fight with you, you know, nor ride by your side," she lamented.

"Stop here, my love," commanded Gibamund, as the arrows of the Byzantines began to fall among the Vandals. "Not a step further! Not within range of the arrows! Wait here, upon this little elevation. I leave you ten of my men as a guard. From this spot you will have an excellent view. Watch the white heron's wings on my helmet and the dragon-banner. I follow that."

A pressure of the hand, and Gibamund rode on. Hilda reined in her horse; she was very pale,

The first encounter took place almost immediately. Johannes the Armenian, one of the best of the captains of Belisarius, pushed forward with his countrymen across the brook, the water of which came up only to their knees, and began ascending the bank occupied by the Vandals.

He was beaten back at once. Zaro hurled his first division upon him with the force with which a bird of prey strikes its victim. The Romans were driven headlong down the half-climbed hill into the middle of the brook, whose waters were soon colored red with blood, and finally back to the other shore.

From where she stood, Hilda saw the whole scene distinctly. "Oh, at last, at last," she cried, "a breath of victory!"

Zaro did not follow farther, but prudently led his men back to the left bank of the stream. "First let us utilize once more our position on the hill and drive them down here again," he said with a laugh.

In their flight the Armenians had borne along with them their valiant leader, who had received a wound in the arm from Zaro's sword. Turning to Marcellus, the commander of the body-guard, he said grimly: "The devil has taken possession of these cowards of Decimum. That they fight

only with their swords confuses my lancers. The barbarians dash our long spears to the right, rush up to our men and stab them with the sword. And this fellow with the buffalo-helm thrusts with the strength of a wild bull. Give me your shield-bearers. I will try it once more."

With the shield-bearers, led by Martinus, the Armenian repeated the attack. Not an arrow, not a javelin met his advancing troops, but as soon as they began to climb the little hill on the Vandal bank, the Germans charged again with drawn swords. Martinus fell by Gibamund's hand. Upon this the shield-bearers turned and fled. The Armenians hesitated, wavered, fell for an instant into confusion, then they also fled, pursued by the Vandals.

" Charge on the foemen !
Fight them, and hurl them
Down in the conflict !"

rang out the battle-song triumphantly along Zaro's lines. But the latter once more led the Vandals back to the left bank. " They must repeatedly see the backs of the dreaded Byzantines, before they will gain courage to defeat them utterly," he said to Gibamund, who urged him to pursue. " And—but where is Belisarius?"

It was just at this moment that the Byzantine

general arrived on the field of battle, with his five hundred horsemen. and witnessed the repulse and flight of his cavalry.

When he learned that this was the second unsuccessful assault, he commanded all his body-guard, men trained equally well to fight on foot or on horseback, to dismount and advance on foot, together with the Thracians under Althias, to a third attack. They were to bear with them his own banner, the "standard of the general."

It was a striking spectacle, and to the Vandals a threatening one. The trumpets of the Romans sounded a salutation to the general's banner. Like a moving wall of steel the Byzantines advanced in close array, with their long lances levelled. Zaro saw that his followers were startled.

"Now forward! Across the brook! Charge!"

He sprang on in advance. But he soon noticed that very few, except the Gundings and their boar-helms, were following him.

"Forward!" he commanded again, but still the Vandals hesitated. They felt that the rush down from the hill had rendered their success easier; they did not wish to abandon this advantageous position; and, besides, they had seen in the distance Belisarius. Meantime the formidable array of spearmen was steadily advancing.

"If we, too, only had our spears!" were the words Zaro heard anxiously uttered behind him. The Byzantines had already reached the brook, they were wading the narrow stream, and still the Vandals on the hill did not obey the order to attack.

"You will not?" cried the angry Zaro. "Oh, but you SHALL!"

With these words he snatched from the hands of the horseman at his side the dragon-banner of Geiseric, and with the cry, "Regain your banner and your honor!" hurled it with all his might across the brook, right into the ranks of the Byzantines.

A Thracian picked up the banner and started to carry it to Belisarius.

But he did not get far.

For when they saw the most valued treasure of their kingdom in the hands of the enemy, all the Vandals, on horse and on foot, dashed down the hill, rushed into the brook, and fell upon the Byzantines.

Then there sprang forward from Zaro's side a strange figure, mounted upon a powerful horse. It was a monk, clad in a gray mantle, without helmet, shield, or coat-of-mail, but with a flashing sword in his hand. He broke his way through

the hostile horsemen, reached the bearer of the red banner, wrested it from his hand, and with a single stroke of his sword laid him dead at his feet. The fallen man was Valerianus, the commander of the mounted lancers.

The victor swung on high the regained banner, but a moment after fell from his horse, pierced at once by five javelins.

But from the hands of the dying man Gundobad, the Gunding, took the banner. "This way! Mass here, men of the Gundings!" he cried. "This way, you boars, and show your tusks!"

And, even while he spoke, his brother reached his side, followed by the whole band of the boar-helms. For the moment, at least, the banner and its bearer were rescued.

The nearest lines of the enemy wavered and began to fall back.

"Victory!" shouted the Vandals, and, pressing boldly forward, they sang:

"Charge on the foemen!
Follow the banner,
The glory-crowned banner,
That leads us to victory!"

And with their sword-blades they struck upon their shields a ringing accompaniment.

"Victory!" cried the exulting Hilda, as she gazed down upon the glorious scene.

XXXIX.

BELISARIUS also saw the critical situation of affairs.

"Hasten," he cried to Procopius, "hasten to Fara and the Heruli. Let them wheel to the left and capture that red rag."

"And the Huns?" Procopius asked. "Look! They are riding slowing forward; but not towards the west, not against the Vandals—"

"Obey! A bloody end must be put to this wild dance around the red banner. If the fighting furore of their Teutonic blood is once really aroused, it is all over with us. In case of necessity, my countenance alone will hold the Huns in check."

Procopius drove the spurs into his horse and dashed away to the right.

Mean while the dragon-banner had again changed its bearer. Innumerable arrows and darts were aimed at it from all sides. Gundobad's horse fell, and its rider did not rise again.

But from his hand his brother Gundomar caught the banner and thrust the spear-point on its shaft into the throat of Cyprianus, the second leader of the Thracians, who had cleft with his battle-axe the boar-helm and head of Gundobad, as the lat-

ter was about to spring up from his dead horse. Hilda had seen the red banner disappear for a moment. In her anxiety she gave her horse a gentle blow with her hand, and the fiery creature darted swiftly forward. Not until she reached the brook did it occur to her to draw rein. A few moments later the soldiers of her guard joined her at the newly selected place of observation.

Althias the Thracian had now reached the second Gunding. The fight was unequal, almost necessarily fatal to every banner-bearer. The left hand, which held the reins and carried the heavy banner, could not manage the shield, while the weight itself materially impaired the power of the right arm for defence. After a short battle Gundomar fell from his horse, pierced by the Thracian's spear.

But in an instant Gibamund was on the spot, and close behind him Zaro. When the latter saw the banner safe in his brother's hands, he cried. "Belisarius also has a banner!"

And swiftly darting to the left, he scattered with a furious charge of his horse a whole line of Thracians, reached the guardsman of Belisarius who carried the gold-embroidered imperial standard, and with a sweeping stroke of his sword cut right through the front of the man's helmet.

The Roman standard fell, while Gibamund,

surrounded and strongly covered by his followers, waved on high again the red dragon-banner.

Hilda saw it distinctly. Involuntarily she followed the movement forward, to victory. Her black horse, obedient to her lightest indication, bore her across the brook, whose water scarcely touched the border of her long white robe. She was across; she was following the victory! Before her, somewhat to her left, she saw Gelimer and his cavalry—for the whole centre of the Vandals was now in full advance.

It was the zenith of Vandal success, and also the turning-point of the battle.

Again Althias endeavored to force his way through the throng, and at length succeeded in reaching Gibamund. Scarcely, however, had a couple of blows been exchanged between them, when there came from the left to the Thracian's ear a wild cry of lamentation. He turned and saw his general's standard fall.

It was the second time, for Zaro had slain the second man who bore it. Already the victor was stretching out his hand to seize the pole of the banner, which no third Byzantine showed a disposition to take up, when suddenly there came from the right, close at hand, the sound of German horns. It was the Heruli, who, assailing the Van-

dals on the flank, had broken through their ranks and were charging straight against Zaro.

A well-aimed javelin, hurled by Fara's hand, carried away the buffalo-helmet from the head of the Vandal leader ; he could give no further attention to Belisarius's banner, but was forced to think of his own safety. Half turning round, he cried :

" Now to our help, King Gelimer ! "

" Here I am, brother, " was the answer. For the king was already close to the spot.

Slowly following the advance of his brothers, he had led his Vandals and Moors steadily nearer, until he perceived the new attack of the enemy and the moment of danger.

" Forward ! Rescue Zaro ! " he shouted, and dashed fiercely at the head of his followers against the Heruli. A man sprang forward, seized with his left hand the bridle of the king's horse and aimed a javelin with his right ; but before the spear could fly, Gelimer's sword had pierced the Herulian's throat.

Hilda saw it ; for constantly nearer and nearer she rode up to the battle, as if irresistibly attracted by the clash of arms.

At this moment she saw Verus, in his full ecclesiastical garb, dash past her towards the king.

It was by no means easy for him to force his way through the ranks of the Moors and Vandals.

A second, a third spearman was stretched on the ground by Gelimer's sword. He was now close to Zaro, and the force of his Vandals' onset fell full upon the Heruli. These did not yield, but, on the other hand, they were able to gain no further ground. Like two wrestlers who, locked arm in arm, measure against each other an equal strength, neither able to force the other from his position, the opposing squadrons pressed together in a desperate, unyielding struggle.

"Why is our infantry not here?" Belisarius asked, anxiously looking towards the distant hills, through which the Numidian road stretched away towards Carthage.

"I have already sent three messengers to them," replied Procopius.

"There! The Thracians are giving way. The Armenians are wavering. The Heruli are hard pressed by superior numbers. Forward, Illyrians, and save me this battle! Belisarius himself will lead you!"

And with a loud peal of the trumpets, at the head of his five hundred chosen Illyrians, the general charged down the hill to the assistance of the Heruli.

Gelimer heard the sound, saw the coming onset, and beckoned to some fresh squadrons to advance from his reserve. "Yonder!" he called to them, pointing with his sword. "And strike up again the battle-song : .

"' Vengeance is arming
On high in the heavens,
And the right will prevail.'

"You, Verus, here? What is it? Your face is—"

"O king!" cried the priest. "What a bloody crime!"

"What has happened?"

"The officer I sent to take charge of the prisoners—a freedman of mine—misunderstood your words, 'be removed where none can set them free.'"

"Well?"

"He has—he just announced it to me—and escaped when he perceived my anger."

"Well, what?"

"He has put to death Hilderic and Euages."

"Almighty God!" exclaimed the king, turning pale. "I did not desire that."

"But still more—" continued Verus.

"Help, Gelimer!" came the voice of Zaro from the thickest of the fight. Belisarius and the Illy-

rians had reached him. Gibamund was at his side.

Gelimer also spurred forward his horse. But Verus seized the bridle and cried: "The letter! The warning to Hilderic! I have found the letter, stuck fast between two of the drawers. Here it is. Hilderic did not lie. He wished merely to protect himself against you. Although innocent, he has been deposed, imprisoned, and executed."

For a moment Gelimer stared, speechless with horror, into the stony face: he seemed stunned. Then there sounded in his ears the battle-song of his soldiers:

"Vengeance is arming
On high in the heavens,
And the right will prevail."

"Oh, woe, woe! I am a criminal, a murderer!" lamented the king in a loud voice. The sword fell from his grasp, and he covered his face with his hands. Then a fearful spasm seized him, and he seemed about to fall from his saddle. Verus, however, supported him, whirled the king's horse around, so that its back was towards the enemy, and with all his might struck it a blow on the flank. With a bound it darted off. Sersaon and Markomer, the captain of the royal cavalry-guard,

one on each side, held in his seat the reeling rider.

"Help! help! I shall be overpowered, brother Gelimer!" called out again, more urgently, despairingly, the voice of Zaro.

But his words were drowned by the wild, disorderly shouts that burst from the Vandals: "Flee! Flee! The king himself has fled. Flee! Save the women and children!"

And by hundreds they turned their horses about and galloped off, across the brook, towards the camp.

Then Hilda, now only a few steps distant from the tumult, saw Zaro's tall form vanish. His horse fell, struck by a spear. He himself was bleeding from several wounds.

But again he sprang to his feet. Fara the Herulian rushed upon him from the left, and with a blow of his battle-axe shattered his dragon-emblazoned shield. Zaro, however, hurled the broken buckler at the head of the Herulian with such force that, stunned by the blow, he almost reeled from his saddle.

Then on the right Barbatus, the commander of the Illyrians, rode up with his long spear levelled. With his last strength Zaro struck the weapon aside, sprang up close to the horse of the shield-

less rider, and drove his sword between the helmet and breastplate right into the Illyrian's throat.

But in springing back the Vandal sank upon his knee, and before he could regain his footing two horsemen drew up before him with raised javelins.

"Help, Gibamund!" cried the kneeling man, raising his left arm above his head, in place of a shield. He saw himself surrounded by foes; no Vandals anywhere. Ah, yes, one—the red banner still waved!

"Help, Gibamund!" he cried.

His appeal was answered. One of his assailants fell from his horse, and Gibamund was at Zaro's side. With the spear-point on the pole of the banner he had struck the man just under his upraised arm. But now Fara, who had meantime recovered from the blow received from Zaro's shield, letting fall the reins of his horse, grasped with his left hand at the pole of the banner. Gibamund defended himself with his sword with difficulty against the mighty blows the Herulian's right hand dealt with the battle-axe.

The other horseman who with lifted spear had halted before Zaro now turned upon the Vandal a countenance of striking power. "Yield, heroic man!" he said. "Yield to me—I am Belisarius!"

Zaro shook his head. With feeble strength he sprang up, his sword raised to strike. But Belisarius with all his force thrust the head of his spear up to the shaft through Zaro's coat-of-mail into his breast. The dying man cast one glance to the left: he saw Gibamund's white horse sink down, streaming with blood; he saw the red banner fall. "Woe, Vandalia!" was his heart-broken cry; then his eyes closed in death.

"That was a hero!" said Belisarius, bending over him. "Where is Geiseric's banner, Fara?"

"Gone!" replied the Herulian, angrily. See, yonder it vanishes—on the other side of the brook."

"Who has—"

"A woman! In a helmet with falcon's wings—with a silver-white shield. I half believe it was a Valkyr," said the heathen, with a slight shudder. "It all happened so quickly I scarcely saw it. I had just slain the young banner-bearer's horse. Then a black steed—I never saw such an animal!—dashed against my own with such violence that it sank back upon its hind-quarters, and I heard a voice: 'Hilda? Thanks!' And at the same instant the black horse bounded away with the speed of the wind. I think it bore two riders. A long white mantle floated after it—or was it the wings of a swan?—and over this waved the

red banner. There it is, just disappearing in yonder cloud of dust. Hilda," concluded the German, as if communing with himself, "the name also agrees. Yes, it was a Valkyr that bore it away."

"Forward!" shouted Belisarius. "Pursue them! Across the brook! There is no longer any army of the Vandals. Their centre is broken—is routed. And behold our faithful Huns!" he laughed scornfully, "how they are rushing down from their hill and falling upon the fleeing barbarians! What an act of heroism! And how they are all aiming for the camp to plunder it! And yonder, at last, our infantry is coming up on our left flank. There, too, the Vandals have taken to flight without a battle. On to the camp! The Huns must not have the whole booty. All the gold and silver for the emperor, the pearls and precious stones for the empress! Forward!"

XL.

TO CETHEGUS FROM PROCOPIUS.

I HAVE witnessed a good many of Belisarius's battles, most of them, it is true, from a safe distance, but I never before saw so peculiar an encounter as this.

In this combat, which has decided the fate of the Vandal kingdom, we have lost altogether only forty-nine men, but all of them our very best people, and among the number eight commanders. Fara, Althias, Johannes, are all three wounded. Yet we have not many, not more than a hundred, disabled; for the Vandals fought only with their swords, and such a contest leaves nearly as many dead as injured. The most of our loss was suffered at the hands of the three Asdings, two nobles in boar-helmets, and an apparently crazy monk. Eight hundred dead Vandals lay upon the field, but by far the greater part of these fell in the course of the flight. We have captured, including the wounded, about ten thousand men, together with women and children almost innumerable. On our two wings we did not lose a man, except indeed a Hun whom Belisarius was compelled to hang because he had filled his pockets, shoes, hair, and ears with pearls and gems industriously collected in the Vandal camp, especially in the tents of the women. And these jewels, you know, are all reserved for the Empress Theodora, who has honestly earned them.

Our pursuit was checked only by our own covetousness. The fallen and captured Vandals wore rich decorations of silver and gold on their wea-

pons and horses, and our heroes stopped to plunder each one before they passed him by. Our horsemen, who first reached the enemy's camp, did not dare, in spite of their greed, to enter at once. They deemed it impossible that an army so overwhelmingly superior in number to themselves would not defend their own camp, containing their wives and children.

The king is said to have halted here for a moment, like a man dazed. But when Belisarius appeared with his troops before the tents, Gelimer, with the cry, "The avenger!" continued his flight towards Numidia, accompanied by a few of his relatives and servants, and by the faithful Moors. Then, in a wild rush to escape, all the Vandal soldiers dashed out of the camp, abandoning their screaming children, their lamenting wives, and all their rich possessions without a stroke of the sword.

And these are—or rather these were Germans! No wonder if Justinian next attempts to free Italy and Spain from the Goths.

Our troops followed the fugitives for the rest of the day and through the whole moonlight night, slaughtering the men without resistance, and seizing the women and children by thousands, to reduce them to slavery. Never before

in my life have I seen so much beauty, and never, also, such piles of money, both gold and silver, as in the tents of the king and Vandal nobles. It seems almost incredible.

But Belisarius after the victory was troubled with the gravest apprehensions. For in this camp, abounding in beautiful women, in wine and supplies, in treasures of every sort, our soldiers forgot all prudence, all discipline; intoxicated by their unheard-of and undreamed-of good fortune, they lived only for the pleasure of the moment; they broke through every barrier, cast from them every curb. It seemed they could not sate themselves.

That demon of Africa, inordinate desire for pleasure, had taken possession of them. Singly or in small parties they roamed through the camp and its neighborhood, following the tracks of the fugitives, wherever the prospect of booty or enjoyment lured them. There was no longer any thought of the enemy, any regard for their general's commands. Those who were still sober endeavored, loaded down with booty and driving the prisoners before them, to make their way back to Carthage. Belisarius says, had the Vandals attacked us again an hour after we had entered their camp, not a man of us all would have es-

caped. So completely had the control of the victorious army, and even of his own guardsmen, slipped from his hands.

At daybreak he summoned together all—that is, all who were sober. His guardsmen came quickly enough and evidently repentant. Then, instead of an address of praise and thanks, he delivered to the officers and soldiers a reproof, such as I have never heard from his lips.

He told us we were military adventurers, serving for pay, ruffians as bold and savage as ravenous beasts, excellently adapted, like hunting leopards, for a bloody chase, but not able to leave the slaughtered prey or to bring it to the hunter, and then creep back into the cage. We must first devour in advance our share of the blood and the flesh. It was not very complimentary ; but much better than philosophy and theology, rhetoric, grammar, and dialectics combined.

The Vandal war is, I fancy, at an end. Tomorrow we shall, doubtless, capture the fugitive king.

Belisarius entrusted to his countryman, the Thracian Althias, the pursuit of the fleeing king. “I choose you,” he said, “because I trust you above all when there is need of quick and inde-

fatigable action. If you overtake the Vandal before he finds a place of refuge, the war is over; but if you permit him to escape, you will make for us considerable further trouble. Choose your own troops, but rest neither day nor night until you have taken the tyrant, living or dead."

Althias blushed like a flattered girl, chose, in addition to his Thracians, some guardsmen, and a couple of hundred Heruli under Fara. He also begged me to accompany him, less, I suppose, on account of my unwarlike sword than for the sake of my advice. I willingly consented.

And now began a most remarkable chase after the Vandals. For five days and five nights we pushed on, almost without stopping, following the tracks of the fugitives, which were plainly visible in the sand of the desert. We gradually reduced more and more the advantage of their start, so that on the fifth night we felt sure that on the next day we would overtake them and bring them to a stand, before they could reach the protecting Pappuan Mountains.

But it was not the will of the capricious goddess that Gelimer should fall into the hands of Althias.

Uliari, a member of Belisarius's body-guard, is a valiant fellow and very strong, but thoughtless

and, like all Germans, too fond of drink. He is also an enthusiastic hunter, and has been repeatedly punished because, even on the march, he set out in pursuit of every wild animal that showed itself.

At sunrise on the sixth day, when, after a short rest, we had mounted again, Uliari saw a large vulture sitting on one of the prickly bushes which in certain parts of the desert grow almost to a man's height out of the salty ground. To grasp his bow, draw an arrow from his quiver, take aim, and shoot, was the work of an instant. The bow twanged, the bird flew off; but a cry was heard just ahead of us, and Althias, who was riding forward in advance of the rest, fell from his horse, shot in the back of the head, just below his helmet. Uliari, usually an excellent archer, had not slept off his drunkenness of the night before. Horrified at his deed, he put spurs to his horse and fled back to the nearest inhabited place, to seek asylum in the chapel there.

We all gathered around the dying Althias, although he commanded us by signs to leave him to his fate and to continue the pursuit. But we could not find it in our hearts to do this. In fact when Fara and I, after our friend had expired in our arms, desired to proceed, the Thracians de-

manded with threats that the corpse should first be buried, in order that his spirit might not be condemned to lament his fate here until the judgment-day. We dug a grave, therefore, and buried the body with the customary honors.

This loss of a couple of hours ensured Gelimer's escape. The fugitives reached their goal, the Pappuan Mountains on the border of Numidia, mountains whose almost inaccessible summits can be gained only by a laborious ascent over steep and rugged masses of rock. The Moors who dwell here are faithful and devoted to Gelimer. An old city, Medenus, now merely a collection of huts on the northern ridge of the mountain, received the king and his companions.

To carry by assault these rough antelope-paths would be an impossibility. A single man with a shield could successfully block the ascent. The Moors have rejected contemptuously our proposition that they should surrender the refugees and receive in return a liberal reward. And so, patience! We will pitch our camp at the foot of the mountain, guard all the paths, and starve the people out.

But that may take some time. It is now winter. Sometimes in the morning we see the mountain-tops covered with a light snow, which, however,

the sun soon dissolves, when it breaks through the clouds. But it does not always break through, while, on the other hand, mist and rain do unceasingly penetrate the camel-skins from which our tents are made.

XLI.

WE still lie before the only entrance to these Pappuan Mountains. We cannot get in; the others cannot get out. I once saw a cat lying thus in front of a mouse hole. It was tedious for the cat, very; but as the hole had no other outlet, the mouse was compelled either to starve or to run at length into the claws of its enemy.

To-day we received news and reinforcements from Carthage. Belisarius, informed of the situation of affairs, has appointed Fara to the chief command instead of Althias. It was Fara with his Heruli who won for Belisarius his most glorious battle, the victory over the Persians at Dara. Nothing but German heroism, which, I take it, is closely related to insanity, could have saved the day. As it was, Fara left more than half his Heruli dead upon the field. Belisarius, I learn, is now marching against Hippo.

Further news—from Hippo:

Our general took the city without resistance.

The Vandals, among them many nobles, sought refuge in the Catholic churches and abandoned their asylum only upon assurance that their lives would be spared. And soon the wind blew again—this time literally—a rich prize into our hands.

The tyrant prudently had removed the royal hoard of the Vandals from the citadel at Carthage, since he mistrusted both the fidelity of the citizens and the protection afforded by the dilapidated walls. He placed this hoard upon a ship and commanded Bonifacius, his private-secretary, to convey it to Spain, if disaster overtook the Vandals, to Theudis, the king of the Visigoths. It was with him that Gelimer designed to take refuge, in case he should lose his kingdom, in order, perhaps, with the aid of the Visigoths ultimately to regain it.

A violent storm drove the treasure-ship back into the harbor of Hippo, just after Belisarius had occupied the place. So the hoard of the Vandals, plundered by Geiseric from the coasts and islands of three seas, is now on its way to Byzantium, into the hands of the imperial pair. Theodora, your piety is profitable!

And yet not quite all the royal treasures of the Vandals are going to Byzantium.

The Emperor Titus, when he destroyed Jerusa-

lem, conveyed to Rome the sacred vessels of the Jewish Temple—candlesticks, bowls, dishes, pitchers, and every conceivable sacred article of gold or of silver, many of them adorned with pearls and other gems. When Geiseric plundered Rome, he transferred in his pirate ships the Temple treasures to Carthage. The empress was aware of this; and this treasure was not the least of the reasons which necessitated the bishop's dream. When now these sacred vessels were about to be shipped at Hippo with the rest of the hoard to Carthage—Belisarius wishes the entire booty to be displayed on his triumphal entry into Byzantium—the oldest of the Jews of Hippo sought an interview with Belisarius, and said:

“Take warning, mighty warrior! Do not ship these vessels to Byzantium. Listen to a fable from the mouth of thy humble servant:

“An eagle stole a piece of meat from the burnt-offering and bore it to his eyrie. But some glimmering coals adhered to the meat consecrated to God. And these glimmering coals set fire to the nest of the great bird of prey and consumed his young, whose wings were not yet strong enough for flight, and the mother-eagle with them. And when the old eagle attempted to save them, he fell into the flames. Thus the powerful robber

that had carried into his house that which belonged to the holy God met a wretched death. Truly, truly, I say unto you, the Capitol at Rome fell into an enemy's hands because it held the vessels of God's temple; the citadel of the Vandals fell into an enemy's hands because it contained these treasures. Shall now the citadel of the emperor at Byzantium—God bless the defender of justice!—be the third eagle's eyrie that is destroyed on their account? Truly, I say unto you, thus speaks the Lord: This gold and this silver shall wander over the earth, and shall destroy every city to which robbery conveys it, until the gold and silver lie again in the holy city of Jerusalem."

And lo! Belisarius was frightened. He wrote to the Emperor Justinian the old Jew's fable, and—really and truly the Patriarch Moses can accomplish greater miracles than St. Cyprian!—Justinian, who is more avaricious than all the Jews combined, ordered that these treasures should be taken, not to Byzantium, but to Jerusalem. And there they are to be divided between the Christian churches and the synagogues of the Jews.

So the old Hebrew has gotten back, without a stroke of the sword, a part of the treasure for his people, while Romans, Vandals and Byzantines gained them only after fierce fighting and with

the expenditure of much blood. Does the old man believe in the curse that lies upon the treasures? I fancy that he does believe it. In such a case he would not have to lie, and his faith would subserve his purpose. Therefore, why not believe it?

Gradually, as we learn, what is left of the barbarian kingdom is being picked off, piece by piece, for Justinian's wide-open mouth, just as a man eats artichokes. The next care of Belisarius, after his victory over the land forces, was to get possession of the hostile fleet.

He learned from captives where it lay at anchor, and learned also that it was very weakly manned, as Zaro had taken with him almost all the soldiers. A few of our triremes, sent out from Carthage, sufficed to take possession of the hundred and fifty galleys, upon which we found only some sailors. Not a spear was thrown. So the much-dreaded pirate-ships of Geiseric were brought in tow to Carthage, having been captured without resistance, like a flock of storm-beaten wild swans that fall exhausted and with crippled wings into a pond, where one can easily catch them with his hand. A lieutenant of Belisarius has regained Sardinia. It was necessary, but sufficient, to show

the head of Zaro on a spear. Until then the people would not believe in the overthrow of the Vandals; but when they saw the head of their dreaded conqueror, they no longer doubted.

Corsica, too, at once submitted; so also the populous Cæsarea in Mauretania, and Septa, one of the Pillars of Hercules. Tripolis was besieged by the Moors, who, during the struggle between Byzantium and the Vandals, thought an opportunity was presented to acquire land and booty on their own account. The city was, however, relieved by us, and received for the emperor from the hands of Pudentius.

One might almost suppose that the entire nation of the Vandals consisted of their royal house and a few nobles. After Zaro and the nobles with him fell, after the king took to flight, all resistance ceased, just as the sticks fall apart from a bundle when the cord that binds them together is cut. Since the day at Tricameron the barbarians suffer themselves to be caught like sheep. We find them now only in the Catholic churches, where, seeking sanctuary and without weapons, they embrace the altars which they have so often dishonored.

Assuredly, if their brothers in Italy and Spain, if their cousins, the Franks, the Allêmanni, and the other hordes of these barbarians, by whatever

names they are known in Gaul and Germany, were also as cultured as these Vandals, and could, like them, compose poetry in Latin and in Greek, then the Emperor Justinian, with the aid of Belisarius and Narses, would soon take away the entire West from the Germans. But I fear the Vandals stand alone on such a pinnacle of refinement.

XLII.

FURTHER news! Perhaps another war and fresh victories close at hand!

Shall I, in reality, O Cethegus, soon be permitted to visit you in your Italy and help you, by means of the Huns and Heruli, to deliver Rome? Your tyrants, the Ostrogoths, have made the bridge for us into this land; your Sicily was that bridge. Justinian's thanks are quick of wing. When Belisarius was about to sail from Byzantium he received from the emperor sealed commands, with instructions not to open the papyrus until after the overthrow of the Vandal kingdom. In accordance with these instructions, our general now demands from the court at Ravenna the cession of the important promontory and fortress of Lilybæum and of all that part of Sicily which formerly belonged to the Vandals. For the

kingdom of the Vandals has now reverted to Byzantium; consequently all that ever pertained to this kingdom is subject to the same reversion. One is not emperor of the Pandects for nothing.

To be honest, I consider it a little brutal to reveal so quickly to the startled eyes of our dupes their amazing stupidity. It is certainly the crown of all statesmanship to overthrow the first by the aid of the second, and then, by way of thanks, to overthrow the second also. But it has been a long time since the game has been played quite so openly. Belisarius must, therefore, threaten war, and war not only for Lilybæum and Sicily, but for all Italy, for Ravenna and Rome. Immediately after the battle of Tricameron I composed for Belisarius the letter to the Queen-regent Amalaswintha, in accordance with the secret instructions of the emperor. It closes as follows: "If you refuse, you will find out that you have brought upon yourselves, not the danger of war, but war itself; a war in which we shall take from you not merely Lilybæum, but all that you hold without right, and that is—all Italy." The news to-day is that a revolution has taken place at Ravenna. Some evil-disposed men, who formerly wished to support the Vandals against us, men who do not

love Justinian, (and also, unfortunately, do not fear him) have seized the helm of government there and flatly rejected our demands. The names of these barbarians—Hildebrand, Witiges, Teia—you are doubtless more familiar with than I am. But I fancy I can hear the sound of trumpets in the air.

First, however, we must get possession of this Vandal king without a kingdom. The siege is lasting altogether too long for our impatience and that of Belisarius. All propositions for a surrender have hitherto been refused, even the senselessly favorable terms offered by us in order to bring the affair to an end. Our general's desire seems to be to have a speedy triumphal entry into Byzantium, such as has not taken place for more than a century, and then to continue on in Italy as he has begun here. And since persuasion with words will not prevail with this remarkable king, who seems sometimes to be soft wax, at others the hardest granite, we shall to-morrow undertake to persuade him with javelins.

Fara hopes that hunger has so exhausted the Vandals and Moors on the mountain that they cannot hold out against a vigorous attack. The truth is, Fara, a German—and a most excellent

fellow!—can endure everything except a continuation of thirst and inactivity. Now our stock of wine has run low, and what we have is bad. And we have nothing to do except alternately to sleep and to keep guard before the mouse-hole called Pappua. He has had enough of this and is determined to force matters to an issue. As, however, I observe the steep and narrow path up those rugged rocks I have my doubts about the result. I fear, unless St. Cyprian or Lady Fortune performs another miracle for us, we shall get tomorrow, not Gelimer and the Vandals, but hard knocks.

Well, we have them! I mean the hard knocks. The Vandals and the Moors up there wagered with each other which could treat us worst, and we paid the stakes.

Fara performed his duty as a commander and a soldier as well as a man could do when he attempts the impossible. He divided us into three divisions; first the Armenians, then the Thracians, and last of all the Heruli. The Huns, whose horses can do much, but not exactly climb over the rocks like goats, remained below in front of the camp.

In divisions of two hundred men each we ad-

vanced in a long procession, two abreast, in front in single file, up the only traversable path.

I make the story short : the Moors rolled down rocks, the Vandals hurled spears at us. Twenty Armenians fell without having seen a single enemy ; the rest turned back.

Then the Thracians pushed forward with fearless contempt of death. They succeeded in getting, perhaps, a hundred steps higher. By that time they had lost thirty-five men, and still not an enemy in sight. Then they too turned back.

"Cowardice !" scolded Fara.

"It is an impossibility," replied Arzen, the severely wounded leader of the Armenians. A Vandal spear, marked with the emblem of the Asdings, a flying dart, had penetrated his thigh.

"That I do not believe," Fara cried. "Follow me, my Heruli !"

They followed. So did I, but discreetly, as one of the last. For, as the legal counsellor of Belisarius, I do not consider myself obligated to extraordinary deeds of heroism. Only when he himself is looking on, I sometimes foolishly fancy my place is at his side.

I have never seen such an assault. Masses of rock and spears, hurled by invisible hands, crushed and impaled our men. But those still

left alive climbed, leaped, and crept higher and higher. The top of the mountain, which the two first attempts had not nearly reached, was gained. The hiding-places of the Moors among the rocks were surmounted, and many of these brown, haggard creatures paid with their lives for their hospitality towards the fugitives. I saw Fara himself cut down three of them. Then he arranged his almost breathless band and was about to order them to charge through the narrow passage in the rocks on the crest of the mountain, when out of this very gateway burst the Vandals with the king at their head. The dentated crown he wore identified him, and I saw him quite close. Never shall I forget that face ! He looked like a fanatical monk, and yet, at the same time, like the hero Zaro, who fell before Belisarius. Behind him was a young man who much resembled him. The red banner was borne, I verily believe, by a woman. But of this I cannot be sure, for the whole shock came upon us with the swiftness and force of lightning.

The first rank of the Heruli was swept away as completely as if it had never stood there. "Where is the king?" exclaimed Fara, springing forward. "Here!" rang out the answer, and the next moment five of the Heruli were lifting from

the ground the body of their badly wounded leader.

That much I saw. Then I fell over backwards. The young Vandal behind the king had hurled his javelin full against my breastplate. I stumbled, fell, and slipped along down the shingly decline, far faster and more easily than I had climbed it. When I finally picked myself up, his faithful followers were carrying past me Fara stretched upon two shields. The officer of the Armenians was leaning on his spear. "Do you believe it now, Fara?" he asked. "Yes," replied the latter, holding his hand to his head. "Now I believe it. Oh, my handsome helmet!" he laughed. "But better the helmet split alone than the skull beneath it too!"

When we got below, however, he was in no mood for laughing. Of his two hundred Heruli, one hundred and twenty were lying dead among the rocks. That was our first attempt to storm the Pappuan Mountain, and I think it will be the last.

Fara's wound is healing, but he complains a good deal of headache.

Up there on that accursed mountain the Vandals must die a miserable death by starvation.

Deserters frequently come to us now, but exclusively Moors. As yet in the whole campaign not a Vandal has voluntarily joined us, and, that, too in spite of my elegantly-worded invitation to revolt and treachery. Fidelity is the only one of the much-praised German virtues that seems to be left to this degenerate race.

Fara has commanded that we shall receive no more deserters. "The more mouths and stomachs there are with Gelimer," he says, "the less there will be for each." But now since they are no longer accepted as comrades-in-arms, the Moors sell themselves to us as slaves, in exchange for a piece of bread.

Even these dismal business transactions have finally been prohibited by Fara. He said to his soldiers: "Let them starve together up there, that the sooner you may get them all as slaves taken in war."

It is said that there are not more than forty Vandals on the mountain. It does them all honor that they still hold out when Moors succumb. That, I take it, is as great a paradox as one can think of. For all that we heard in Byzantium concerning the luxuriousness and effeminacy of the Vandals was far surpassed by what we found in their palaces, villas, and

private houses, and by what the Carthaginians related to us: two, even three baths a day, on their tables the delicacies of all lands and seas, all their service of pure gold, pageants, sports of the circus, hunting—but with the least possible exertion!—dancers, actors, musicians, promenades in delightfully laid out groves full of the choicest fruit-trees, daily banquets, daily drinking-bouts, and the enjoyment of unbridled pleasures of every sort. As the life of the Vandals was the most luxurious of all the people in the world, so that of the Moors is the most indigent and pinched. Half-naked, wearing alike in winter and summer only a short gray garment, they live in low huts made of skins or leather, huts in which one can scarcely breathe; neither the snow of the mountains nor the burning heat of the desert affects them; they sleep on the bare ground, only the richest spreading under them a camel's skin; they know neither bread nor wine, nor any other of the better kinds of food, but like cattle chew unground, unparched barley and spelt.

And now the Vandals hold out with unbroken spirit while the Moors succumb. It is incomprehensible; for are they not the same people from whom we have taken Africa in two short cavalry-battles? To all our astonished questions the

deserters return but one answer, 'The holy king.' He inspires them with his eyes, with the sound of his voice, with magic.

Fara thinks, however, that no magic can prevail long against hunger and thirst. And since, according to the reports of these gaunt and famished Moors, the sufferings of the king and his followers are beyond all description, it occurred to Fara, really out of kindness of heart, to put an end to this misery. Therefore he dictated to me the following letter :

"Pardon me, King of the Vandals, if what I am writing to you seems somewhat foolish. My head was always better adapted for enduring sword-cuts than for composing letters. And since you and my head came into collision it is still harder for me to think than it was before.

"I write—or, rather, I have this letter written—frankly, after the manner of a barbarian.

"My dear Gelimer, why do you plunge yourself and those who are faithful to you into such an abyss of misery? Merely that you may not be compelled to be subject to the emperor? For the word 'freedom' is, I suppose, the thing that deludes you. Do you not see that you are under obligations for this freedom to wretched Moors, and that its continuance depends upon these

savages? Is it not better to be a subject of the great emperor at Byzantium than to rule over a handful of starving followers at Pappua? Or is it disgraceful to acknowledge the same master that Belisarius serves?

“Lay aside this folly, noble Gelimer. I myself am a German, of the royal blood of the Heruli, and my ancestors ruled as kings in our old home on the coast of the stormy sea, opposite the islands of the Danes; yet I serve under the great commander, and I am proud of it. My sword and the ready valor of my Heruli decided the greatest victory of great Belisarius. I have remained a general and a hero, although in the emperor’s service. The same opportunity awaits you. Belisarius assures to you your life, your freedom, an estate in Asia Minor, the dignity of patrician, and a military command immediately under himself. Esteemed Gelimer, noble king, I mean this well. Defiance is, in its place, an excellent thing, but folly is—foolish. Bring it to an end.”

The messenger has returned. He saw the king himself, and says he looks like a ghost rather than a mortal, a veritable king of shadows. And this inflexible man, when he read the kindly letter of the good-hearted German, burst into tears. He

wept like a woman, he who struck down the hitherto unconquered Fara, and who unflinchingly endures privations that seem incredible. Here is the Vandal's answer :

"I thank you for your advice, but I cannot follow it. You have given up your home and are blown about the world like a straw. I was, I am king of the Vandals. I will not serve the unjust enemy of my people. God, as I believe, commands me and the remnant of the Vandals still to endure; he can save us if he will. I can write no further. The sorrow that encompasses me benumbs my thoughts. Send me, kind Fara, a loaf of bread. A tender boy, the son of a fallen noble, lies very sick for want of food. He begs, he implores, he cries so piteously for bread ! It is long since any of us have tasted such a thing.

"And a sponge, dipped in water. My eyes, inflamed by watching and weeping, burn so painfully.

"And a harp. I have composed a song upon our fate, that I would like to sing to the harp."

Fara fulfilled the three requests, although the harp could be obtained only in the nearest city. But still more closely than before he besets the "mountain of sorrow," as our soldiers now name it.

XLIII.

IT was a cold, foggy morning in early March, a morning on which the rays of the sun had not been able to penetrate the dense clouds that hung over the mountains.

The old city of Medenus had long since been abandoned by its Carthaginian and Roman inhabitants. Most of its houses, built of the stone of the mountain, were desolate and in ruins. The few which were still protected by roofs were used in winter by wandering Moors as places of shelter. Of these the old basilica afforded the most room, and here the king and his company had taken up their quarters.

In the middle of the building, on the stone floor, a feeble fire had been kindled from brush-wood and straw, but it gave out more smoke than heat. And every where the damp fog forced its way through the chinks in the walls and through the holes in the roof, where it drove down again the slowly rising, yellowish-gray smoke, which, creeping along the bare walls and through the opening where the entrance-doors had once stood, sought other means of exit. In the semicircular space forming the after-part of the apsis some coverlets and skins were spread upon the marble

pavement. Here sat Gibamund, hammering on his badly hacked shield, while Hilda stitched together the rents in the red banner, which lay across her lap.

"Many a dart has pierced you, old battle-scarred banner! And this gaping rent here—that must have been made by a sword-cut. But you shall still hold together until the end."

"The end!" exclaimed Gibamund, impatiently, finishing with a last stroke of the hammer his work on the shield. "I would it were here! I cannot endure this continued misery—your misery. For a long time I have urged the king to make an end. The Moors may yield themselves up, but let us, all the Vandals, rush together upon the enemy and— He would not let me finish. 'That would be self-murder and sin,' he replied. 'We must patiently endure what God has laid upon us as a punishment. If it be his will, he can also deliver us from this place and bear us hence on the wings of his angels.'"

"The end, however, is approaching, fast approaching. The number of graves yonder on the mountain-side increases daily."

"Yes, ever longer and more numerous grow the rows of the cross-surmounted, high-arched burial-mounds of our Vandals."

"And of the cairns of the faithful Moors, encircled by the ring of black flint. Yesterday evening we buried the youthful Gundoric, the last scion of the proud Gundings, the hope and comfort of his valiant father Gundobad."

"Poor boy! his suffering is over. I remember how I used to see the child in Carthage, dressed in purple silk and reclining in a shell-formed wagon drawn by young ostriches.

"Yesterday the king brought him, as he lay on his wretched bed of straw, the appetizing bread which he had begged from the enemy. The boy began to devour it so greedily that we had to stop him. We turned away for a moment—in company with the king I was bringing water for the sick—when a lamenting and angry cry summoned us back. A Moorish youth, who, I suppose, had detected the odor of the bread, had sprung in through the window and forcibly wrested the morsel from the teeth of the sick child. This affected the king deeply. 'This child too! this innocent one, O terrible God!' he repeated several times. This morning I closed the eyes of the dead Gundoric."

"It cannot endure much longer. The people have long since slaughtered the last horse, except Styx,"

"Styx shall not be slaughtered!" cried Hilda. "It was he that saved you and bore you away from certain death."

"It was you that saved me with your Valkyr-like ride," Gibamund exclaimed; and, happy even in his suffering, he pressed his wife to his breast and kissed tenderly her golden hair, her forehead, and her eyes. "Hark! What is that?"

"That is the song that the king has composed. He sings it to the harp which Fara sent him. Well for you, O Teia's gift, that you are not compelled to accompany such a song!" she said, springing up indignantly and putting the banner aside. "Sooner would I have shattered my harp on the nearest rock than loaned it for such a purpose!"

"But it acts like a magic charm upon the Vandals and the Moors."

"They do not understand it—it is Latin, you know. He has rejected the alliteration, too, as being heathenish, as having the mystic power of runes. He permits no one to speak to him of his last battle-song."

"It is true they scarcely understand it. But when they behold the king as he wanders alone, like one enrapt or in a dream, over the rocks and snow of the mountain, his burning eyes half closed, his disordered hair falling over his pale and

sorrowful face, his tattered royal mantle about his shoulders, his harp in his hand, when they hear the deep pathos of his voice and the plaintive melody of the song, then it works upon them like magic, even if they do but slightly comprehend its sense. Hark! there it is again."

And nearer and nearer, at times broken by the wind, came the words of the song, accompanied by the music of the chords:

" I am mourning, Vandal people,
For thy dark, unhappy fate,
For that name of fallen splendor
Whose renown was once so great.

" Gloriously hast thou arisen,
Like a meteor, from the sea;
Sad and fameless is thy setting
In the night's eternity.

" Richest heaps of dazzling treasure
Geiseric to Carthage led;
Now that great king's last successor,
Hungering, begs his foe for bread.

" God's fierce anger rests upon thee.
Gone thy strength, thy former trust.
Leave to Goths and other Germans
Fame and honor; they are dust."

" I will not listen to it. I cannot bear it," exclaimed Hilda. " It is not right thus to inveigh against what alone makes life worth living."

And now the plaintive melody seemed close at hand, and the accompanying words were distinctly heard.

“ All, alas ! was sin and folly,
All thy glory, Vandal race !
That is why the God of heaven
Sends thee ruin and disgrace.

“ Bend thee, bend thee in submission,
Geiseric's bruised and broken line,
Thankful, kiss the rod that chastens,
Knowing, Lord, that rod is thine.”

The song ceased. Up the half-fallen steps of the basilica slowly came the tottering form of the royal singer, his left arm, which dragged after it the harp, hanging listlessly at his side. When he reached the gray, weather-beaten pillars at the entrance, he laid against the cold stone his right arm and bent down upon it his wearied head.

Just then a young Moor hastened up the steps ; with a couple of bounds he was at the top. Gibamund and Hilda arose in surprise and went towards him.

“ I have not seen you move so nimbly for a long time, Sersaon,” remarked Gibamund.

“ Your eye flashes,” said Hilda. “ You bring good news.”

The king raised his head slowly from the pillar, and gazed at the Moor with a mournful look.

"Yes, white queen," Sersaon replied. "The best news—escape!"

"Impossible!" responded Gelimer in a hopeless tone.

"It is true, O king. Verus here will confirm it."

With slow step, but unbroken in strength, the priest approached the spot. He appeared even prouder and stronger than in the days of prosperity. He held in his hand an arrow and a piece of papyrus.

"Last night," continued the Moor, "I was stationed on guard at our furthest outpost towards the south. Just at daybreak I heard the cry of an ostrich calling for its mate. I held it for deception, for the bird never mounts to such heights, and besides it is not the time for pairing. But this cry is our signal with the tribes to the south, with the Soloans who live over towards the coast.

"I listened now and looked sharply around. And sure enough I saw, clinging closely to the brown wall of rock and scarcely to be distinguished from it, a Soloan.

"I answered the call in a low tone. Then an arrow fell to the ground near me, an arrow without a point; and in the hollow reed was this letter.

I pulled it out—I myself cannot read—but I took it to the nearest Vandals. Two of them read it and uttered an exclamation of joy. Then by chance Verus came along. He wanted to tear up the papyrus, and forbade us to speak to you about it. But hunger and the hope of safety are stronger than his command—”

Here Verus interrupted the Moor: “I considered it a trap, a piece of treachery; it is too improbable.”

Gibamund took the writing from him and read: “The way down on the south, where the cry of the ostrich was heard, is unguarded. It is supposed that it is impossible to descend there. Climb down, one by one, at midnight. We are waiting near by with fresh horses. Theudis, the king of the Visigoths, has sent us gold to save you. There is a small ship ready for you on the coast. Hasten.”

“There is still fidelity! There are still friends in need!” cried Hilda, as with tears of joy she threw herself upon her husband’s breast.

The king drew himself up, and his eye lost its melancholy, hopeless expression. “Do you see now how criminal it would have been to seek death? This is the helping hand which God’s mercy extends towards us. Let us grasp it!”

XLIV.

VERUS advised, in order to lull suspicion for the coming night, that he should be sent to propose to Fara a conference with Gelimer at noon on the following day, on the northern slope of the mountain, at which interview the terms offered by Belisarius could be further discussed.

After some compunctions of conscience, the king consented to this stratagem.

In due time Verus reported that Fara was greatly pleased to receive such a communication, and that he would wait for Gelimer.

Notwithstanding this assurance, the besieged, who, from their position on the mountain, had an unobstructed view, kept a sharp watch all day upon the outposts and camp of the enemy, for the purpose of detecting any movement towards the intended place of descent, or any indication that the plan of flight or the hiding-place of the Moors, at the foot of the mountain, had been discovered.

Nothing of the kind was noticeable. The day passed in the usual way among the Byzantines below. The guards were not strengthened, nor when it grew dark were the watch-fires either increased or changed. The Vandals, also, kindled their fires as usual on the northern side,

Shortly before midnight the little party set out. The Moors who were acquainted with the way went in advance, provided with ropes. At every step the fugitives had carefully to try the ground with the butt-end of their spears, to determine whether the crumbling, broken surface of the mountain afforded a secure foothold. After the Moors came Gibamund and Hilda. The latter had folded together in a small compass the great banner of Geiseric and fastened it to the handle of a spear which served her as a mountain-staff. Then followed Gelimer, behind him Verus and the little band of the remaining Vandals.

Thus they went on for about half an hour along the ridge of the mountain, until they reached the southern side, where the steep and dangerous descent began. Every step was taken at the peril of life, for they did not dare to light torches.

Here suddenly the king turned round. "O Verus," he said, "death may now be very near to us. Offer a prayer— Why, where is Verus?"

"He went back some time ago," replied Marcomer. "He returned for a holy relic which he had forgotten. He commanded us to proceed, and said that he would overtake us at the next bend in the way, before we descend through the gorge."

The king stopped for a moment, and began in a low voice to repeat the Lord's Prayer.

"There is no time to lose," whispered Sersaon the Moor, who was in the lead; "we must pass as quickly as possible around this projecting point—Ha! look! Torches! treason! Back, back to—"

He could not finish, for an arrow pierced his throat. The glare of torches shone dazzlingly in the eyes of the fugitives the moment they turned the projecting wall of rock. Weapons gleamed opposite to them, and in front of the ranks of the Herulians came a man holding a torch and lighting with it the rocks ahead. "The second man yonder is the king," he cried; "take him alive!" And he advanced a step further.

"Verus!" shrieked Gelimer, and fell, swooning, to the ground. Two Vandals raised him and carried him back, up the rocks.

"Forward, there! Storm the place!" commanded Fara from below.

But that was impossible. No army could take by storm a path up which it could advance only in single file, and even then only provided each man steadied himself with both hands against the perpendicular wall of the cliff.

Fara perceived this himself as he viewed the ascent by the light of the torches, and saw Giba-

mund standing with raised spear on the last broad ledge that afforded secure footing.

"Hard luck!" he cried. "But we have closed your last loop-hole of escape. Surrender!"

"Never!" Gibamund exclaimed, and hurled his spear. The man beside Fara fell.

"Shoot! Quick! All together!" commanded the Herulian, angrily.

Behind the Heruli twenty Hunnish archers were posted. Their bows twanged; Gibamund staggered and fell backwards.

With a piercing cry Hilda caught him in her arms. Marcomer stepped forward to the place where Gibamund had stood and threateningly lifted his lance.

"Desist," Fara commanded. "But keep the path well guarded. To-morrow or the day after, at the latest, the priest says they must surrender."

Gelimer had recovered from his swoon just in time to hear Hilda's cry. "Now Gibamund, too, has fallen," he said calmly. "It is over."

And wearily he turned back, supporting himself by his spear. A couple of Vandals followed him.

Hilda sat for a long time in silence, the head of her dead husband on her lap, the banner-wrapped spear resting upon her shoulder. She

did not weep, but in the darkness gently caressed with her hand the loved face.

Then she heard a Vandal who had come back from the king say to Marcomer: "That was the end. I am to announce to the enemy that the king will surrender to-morrow."

She sprang up and asked a couple of the men to help her carry the body back to the top of the mountain. There, in a little pine-grove in front of the old city, was a wooden hut which formerly had held stores of various sorts. Now only the wood cut for fuel still lay there in a considerable pile.

In this hut she passed the night alone with the dead. But when the day dawned she sought the king.

She found him in the basilica, on the spot where the altar had formerly stood—the remains of a couple of steps served to point it out. Here Gelimér had fastened in a crevice between two stones a cross roughly made from boughs. He lay before this upon his face, embracing the cross with both arms.

"Gelimér, my brother-in-law," she said abruptly and sternly, "is it true? Do you intend to surrender?"

He did not answer.

She shook him by the shoulder. "Will you

give yourself up as a prisoner, King of the Vandals?" she asked in louder tones. "They will set you up for a show, lead you as the crowning feature of their triumph through the streets of Byzantium. Will you still further disgrace your people—your dead people?"

"Vanity," he answered monotonously. "Vanity speaks through you. What you are thinking of is sin, is vanity, is pride."

"Why now, so suddenly? You have held out for months. Why yield now?"

"Verus!" he replied, with a deep groan. "God has abandoned me, my protecting spirit has betrayed me. I am condemned upon earth and for ever. I cannot end it otherwise."

"You can. Here, Gelimer, here is your keen-edged sword." She stooped and drew it from its sheath, which, together with the belt, lay at the foot of the steps. "The dead are free. There is truth in the words."

He shook his head. "Vanity—proudness of heart—heathenish sin! I am a Christian; I cannot kill myself. I will bear my cross—as Christ bore his—until I break down under it."

She threw the sword from her, and it fell clanging upon the stones at his feet. Then without a word of farewell she turned from him.

“Where are you going? What is it you mean to do?”

“Do you think I loved less faithfully and passionately than that warm-hearted Grecian girl? I am coming, my hero and my husband!”

She hurried away to a building formerly the senate-house of Medenus, but afterwards converted into a stable. At one time a number of horses had been kept in it; now Styx, the black stallion, was left there alone. She took him by the mane, and quietly as a lamb the faithful and intelligent animal followed her.

She led him to the door of the wooden hut. He stopped for a moment before he would follow her into the narrow enclosure that was feebly lighted by a burning pine-knot, held in an iron clasp.

“Come,” she said to the horse, drawing him gently after her. “It is better for you also. You have long been sick and suffering. Your beauty, your strength is gone. And after the service you rendered in the battle, and in that splendid ride, the enemy shall not take you as booty and torment you with unworthy drudgery. How does it run in the old song?

“‘And they heaped for the hero
The logs for a pyre.

And the death of the master
Was shared by his steed,
Was shared by the wife whom he loved.
For she as a widow
Had no wish to live,
Bearing alone and in sorrow
The burden of life.'"

Then she led the horse close beside the pile of wood upon which she had laid her dead. Feeling with her hand for the spot where the heart beat, she drew Gibamund's sword from its scabbard, and, with a powerful thrust, drove it into the animal's body. The horse fell dead at once, and she threw from her the bloody sword.

"O my love!" she cried, "O my husband, my life! Why did I never fully tell you how deep and fervent was my love? Ah, I did not know myself its full extent until now! But even now hear it, hear it, Gibamund! My whole heart, my whole life, was yours! Thanks, friend Teia! Gibamund, my husband, I am coming!"

She drew the keen, dark dagger from her belt. With a single stroke she separated the banner from the spear and spread it over the body; it was so broad that it covered also the space beside the dead. Next with the blazing pine-knot she set fire to the wood at the base of the pile, and bent over and kissed for the last time the pale, cold

lips. Then raising on high the dark weapon, she plunged it with a sure blow into her proud, courageous heart.

She sank face downward upon Gibamund's body. And the flames, gently curling and crackling, seized first upon the red banner that lay enwrapping both the husband and the wife.

The morning wind blew freshly in through the half-shut door and through the chinks in the logs, and the bright flames soon burst their way through the roof.

XLV.

TO CETHEGUS FROM PROCOPIUS.

It is ended, thanks to God, or to whomsoever else the thanks are properly due !

For three weary months we lay before that stubborn mountain. It is now March. The nights are still cool, but the heat of the midday sun has become almost unbearable.

An attempt at escape failed through treachery. Verus, Gelimer's chancellor and most intimate friend, receives the reward for this disgraceful deed. Acting on the priest's information, we searched the southern side of the mountains for concealed Soloans, who were to have guided the fugitives to the sea, but we found only the tracks

of numerous hoofs which must have passed in that direction. However, we blocked the path of escape. Then the king voluntarily offered to surrender without further delay.

Fara was greatly rejoiced. He would have granted any condition in his power in order to bring the king as a captive to Belisarius, who has been longing even more impatiently than we for the termination of the affair.

At the entrance of the gorge, which we had never been able to force our way through, I received the little party of Vandals, about twenty in number.

The Moors also came down, but at Gelimer's request Fara at once released them.

These Vandals—what living pictures they are of wretchedness, hunger, privation, sickness, and grief!

I cannot comprehend how they were able to hold out and continue their resistance, for they scarcely had strength enough left to carry their weapons; they seemed really glad to be relieved of them.

But when I saw and spoke with Gelimer, then, broken as he now is, I could understand how this man's influence and will could dominate others and compel their support and obedience.

I have never seen his like,—a monk, a fanatic, and yet a kingly hero.

I begged permission from Fara to take him into my tent. While we can with difficulty restrain the others from immoderate use of the food of which they have been so long deprived, he voluntarily continues his fast. Indeed it was with difficulty Fara persuaded him to take some wine. The Herulian fears lest his prisoner may die on the way, before he can deliver him to Belisarius. For a long time he refused ; but when I suggested that perhaps it was his intention to commit suicide in this way, he drank at once and partook of some bread.

For half the night we conversed together. He is full of submissive resignation to his fate. It is touching to hear him attribute all his misfortunes to the will of God. Yet I cannot always follow the subtle train of his thoughts. Thus when I expressed my opinion that, after holding out so long, the failure of his attempted escape had persuaded him to a sudden surrender, he replied with a mournful smile: "Oh no ! Had the flight been thwarted from some other cause, I would have held out until death. But Verus, Verus !"

He paused for a moment, and then added: "You will not understand that. But I know now

that God has abandoned me, if, indeed, he ever looked upon me with favor. I know now that it was a sin to have loved my people so passionately, and out of pride in the Asding blood and our old glory in arms to have refused to submit. It is our duty to love God with our whole hearts and to live only for heaven."

Just then Fara entered the tent, not a little out of temper. "You have not kept faith, king," he complained. "You promised to surrender all your arms and military insignia, but the most important piece of booty, the great banner of King Geiseric, is missing. Belisarius especially charged me to secure this. He saw how it was saved in the battle, and I myself at the time of our recent attack noticed it in a woman's hands. Our people and I myself, guided by the Vandals, have searched everywhere for it. We found these golden nails lying beside some bones in the ashes of a hut. The Vandals say that the nails are from the spear-shaft of the banner. Did you burn it?"

"No; I would not have grudged it to you and Belisarius. A woman did that—Hilda. She slew herself. May God forgive her!"

And this is not hypocrisy. I confess I do not understand this way of looking at things, yet these remarkable occurrences force into my mind

thoughts which I would gladly avoid. He who has once tasted philosophy can never break himself of the habit of asking—Why?

In the history of the human race we often find successes recorded that surpassed all expectation. But whether any previous enterprise was blessed with good fortune comparable to ours is, at least, doubtful.

Belisarius himself is amazed. Five thousand horsemen—for our infantry scarcely struck a blow—strangers, who, after they had landed, possessed no harbor, no fortress, no spot of ground in all Africa except that upon which they stood—five thousand horsemen, in two short battles against ten times their numbers, have overthrown the kingdom of the fearful Geiseric and taken captive his descendant, whose citadel and treasure they have seized!

It is true the generalship of Belisarius and the bravery of our well-disciplined army contributed much towards the result. Something, too, is due to the previously plotted and finally executed treason of Verus, who, we now learn, had been all the time in secret correspondence with the emperor and empress. The most potent of all the causes at work was, undoubtedly, the degeneracy of the people, outside of the royal line. And, be-

sides, the inexplicable, contradictory nature of the king himself vitiated his own best efforts and those of his supporters. But all these combined could not have accomplished the result so speedily, had it not been for the unexampled good fortune which accompanied us from the beginning.

And this good fortune, is it chance? Or is it God's work, who wished to punish the Vandals for their sins and those of their ancestors?

It may be so; and not without reverence do I bow to such a dispensation. But—and here the old cynical doubt twitches me, the doubt that never leaves me—in that case one must say that God is not over-choice about his instruments. For surely this Gelimer and his brothers are not surpassed in nobility of character and virtue by Justinian, Theodora, Belisarius, or perhaps even, O Cethegus, by your friend, the writer of these letters.

XLVI.

ON the day after Gelimer's surrender, the Byzantine camp was broken up, and the march back to Carthage begun.

At the head of the column rode Fara, Procopius, and the other leaders upon horses and camels. In the middle, surrounded by the foot-soldiers,

came the captive Vandals, their hands and feet fettered with chains,—which permitted walking or riding, but not running. The Hunnish cavalry brought up the rear.

Thus the march back proceeded slowly, halts being made at night for rest; it required fourteen days to traverse the ground which had been covered by the swift pursuit in eight.

Verus rode for the most part alone; he avoided the Vandals, and the Byzantines avoided him.

On the second day after leaving the mountain—Fara and Procopius were some distance in advance—the priest checked his horse at a bend of the way, and waited until the prisoners came up. Many a fettered fist was raised against him, many a curse was uttered, but he gave no heed to such demonstrations. Finally Gelimer appeared, tottering along on foot, and holding in his manacled right hand a staff which terminated in a cross.

Verus pushed his horse through the line of guards and rode up close to him. The prisoner glanced up.

“You, Verus!” he said with a shudder.

“Yes, I, Verus. I have waited for you here—for you and for this hour,—for this hour, so long delayed, but come at last, which I have longed

for, prayed for, worked for in every plan and act! For this hour alone I have lived, suffered, struggled for the best years of my life."

"And why, O Verus, why? What evil have I done you?"

Here Verus burst into a loud laugh, and gave such a jerk to the bridle that his horse suddenly stopped.

Gelimer was startled; he had seldom seen this man smile, and never heard him laugh aloud.

"Why? Ha, ha! You ask me why? Because— But in order to answer this question, I must repeat from the beginning the whole story of the persecution which Geiseric inflicted upon us in this land—upon the Romans, the Catholics. Why? Because I am the avenger, the requiter of that century-long crime called the Kingdom of the Vandals in Africa. Hear it, ye saints in heaven! This man stood by while all my family were tortured horribly to death, and he asks why I have hated and ruined him and his people!"

"I know—"

"You know nothing. For you ask me—why? You heard, you would say, the curse of my dying mother. But this you do not know—for you had fallen in a swoon—that I, when she hurled that curse at you, tore myself loose from my bonds,

from my martyr's stake, that I sprang into the flames to my mother, threw my arms around her, and wished to share her death. She thrust me back from the fire and cried: 'Live! Live to avenge me and thy people—and fulfil the curse upon this one and all his race.'

"A second time I sprang forward, clasped the hand of my dying parent, and swore to execute her commands. Then your soldiers tore me away; I saw her sink down in the flames, and I fell senseless to the ground.

"When I came to myself again I was no longer a boy—I was the avenger! I felt nothing but that last pressure of my mother's hand; I saw nothing but the death-look on her face; I heard nothing but my oath. And I abjured my faith—apparently.

"And you, miserable barbarians, rendered stupid by your own arrogance, supposed I did that from cowardice, from fear of torture and the flames!

"How often in former years have I felt your scarcely concealed contempt, and endured it with the deadliest hate, with a wrath which threatened to consume my very heart!

"Arrogant brood of dim-sighted fools! You attributed to me fear and cowardice, in your estimation the most disgraceful of all disgraces. As

if I had not suffered more, all these years, tenfold more than the death by fire in subduing my own feelings, in enduring without a word of explanation the abhorrence of the Catholics at my apostasy, in holding myself under the strictest discipline, in smothering in hate and scorn every impulse of my heart, in outwardly turning myself into stone, while my whole inner being glowed with a consuming fire! I even forced myself to serve you, to perform as your priest the sacrilegious service of your church, to endure your intolerable boasting. Oh, how I hate you!" And he struck with his whip the captive king, who received the blow but did not seem to feel it. "You barbarians—what were you a few generations ago but cattle-thieves on the outskirts of our empire, slaughtered by us by thousands, reduced to slavery, thrown as food to wild beasts, naked, hungry beggars, who thankfully licked up the crumbs that Roman generosity threw to you? Away with you all, you beasts, whose animal strength alone, under God's permission,—as a punishment for our sins,—has enabled you to break your way into the Roman Empire! Away with you, I say!" And he lifted his hand again to strike, but as he saw the eyes of one of the Herulian guards turned threateningly upon him, he disconcertedly let fall his arm.

Gelimer had remained silent, with only an occasional sigh. Now, however, he said gently: "And your conscience? Has it never troubled you? Since that encounter with the lion, I—I trusted you so implicitly, I gave you my whole heart. You were my confessor—did you feel no shame at such deceit?"

For a moment a flush suffused the pale cheeks of the priest, but it was as transient as summer lightning. Then he answered: "Yes, sometimes, in the beginning—so foolish was my heart. But," he continued grimly, "I always overcame this attack of weakness when I said to myself, 'They consider you a man so contemptible that out of cowardice, in the very presence of your dead, you forswore your faith. These insolent, these immeasurably stupid barbarians—yet it is more vain-glorious pride than stupidity—actually suppose that you, the son of these parents, can really be devoted to such masters, can serve them and their brutal and tyrannical power, in forgetfulness of your own martyrs. It is thus they look upon you, thus they treat you—you are to them an object of inexpressible contempt. Revenge yourself, revenge yourself for this insufferable effrontery!' Oh, hate also is a pleasure—the hate of a people against a people! And hated you Ger-

mans shall be as long as a drop of blood flows in the veins of other nations, hated until death, until you are crushed under foot—”

And with his fist he struck the bare head of the king, who was tottering along beside him.

Gelimer neither started nor looked up.

“What are you muttering?” asked the priest, bending over towards him.

“I was praying—‘as we forgive those who have trespassed against us.’ But, perhaps, even that is over-estimation of self, is a sin. It may be you have not trespassed against me. It may be that you are really the angel,”—he shuddered, however, at the thought,—“whom God has sent me, not for my protection, as in my vanity I supposed, but for my punishment—”

“I certainly never was your *good* angel,” laughed the priest.

“But—if it is permitted to ask—”

“Oh yes; ask. I wish to enjoy this hour to the full.”

“If you hated me so bitterly, if you wished to avenge your mother on me, why have you played this game of deceit for so many years? You have had frequent opportunities to kill me—you might have let me perish beside the lion. Why have you acted as you did?”

"Have you not—have you still not comprehended? Fool! It is true I hated you, but I hated still more your people. To destroy you—oh yes! the thought was pleasant! And hard enough I had to struggle with my hate, that I might not kill you instead of the lion. I hesitated—"

"I saw that."

"But I felt that here, in this man, lives the soul of the Vandal nation. To place him upon the throne and then control him, that means to shape the destiny of his people. If I kill him now, I drive Hilderic to a secret agreement with Byzantium, while Zaro, Gibamund, and other warlike men may make a long resistance. But if this man becomes king, this man who, above all others, has power to save his people, and then as king is subject to my will, the Vandal nation is lost beyond a shadow of doubt. To murder him alone—that would be nothing. But through him to ruin and destroy his people—"

A groan broke from Gelimer. He staggered like a man struck with some mortal sickness, and to sustain himself clutched involuntarily at the horse's bridle.

Verus thrust the hand away. Gelimer stumbled and fell down upon the sand; but he arose at once and proceeded on his way.

"Did the priest there strike you?" asked the Herulian, angrily.

"No, friend."

Verus continued: "It was necessary that Hilderic should vacate the throne. He demanded all sorts of conditions on behalf of the Vandals, and Justinian was disposed to grant them. My purpose was, not to bring Gelimer and the Vandals under subjection to Justinian, but utterly to destroy them. Your brother discovered my intercourse with Pudentius—had I been searched then, the letter of Pudentius would have been found, and all would have been lost. Instead of that I betrayed the Tripolitan's hiding-place, but I knew that he was mounted on my best courser and already outside the gates. The king and you both fell into my trap. I rejoiced to see how ready you were to believe in Hilderic's guilt, because you wished it true, because of your secret eagerness for the crown. Even if you dethroned Hilderic in good faith, how alert you were, how zealous to secure the crown for yourself! I stood by, I saw how you struck down Hoamer, who was in the right when he denied that Hilderic had any murderous intentions. You called the combat a judgment of God. You deemed that you were serving God's justice, when you served only your

own ambition and, through that,—me. It was Satan, not God, who gave you the strength of arm to slay Hoamer. It was a devil's judgment—a victory of hell, not a sentence of God. Then I became your chancellor, and that meant your destroyer. I broke off openly with the emperor, but I kept up a secret correspondence with the empress. I sent your fleet away to Sardinia, although some days before I had heard of the sailing of Belisarius.

“After the defeat at Decimum I advised that you and the army should shut yourselves up in Carthage. The game would have ended six months sooner. In this alone you did not follow my advice. Then I had to prevent Hilderic from justifying himself before you. I took the letter of warning out of the drawer before I permitted Hilderic to search for it. No scion of Geiseric's race could I permit to remain alive, for after the victory of Belisarius Justinian would have honorably received your captives. Therefore I had them put to death by my freedman, whose escape I managed. But you—and I had long reserved this for the hour when your strength was at its best, for the possibility of some threatening danger to my plans—you I crushed in the very nick of time by the revelation that you had dethroned and mur-

dered Hilderic without cause. Still my oath was not fulfilled until I saw you in chains, the captive of Justinian. It was simply, therefore, to prevent your escape that I shared all the want and misery of these three months. Letters had come from King Theudis immediately after the fight at Decimum, offering you a means of retreat by the help of the coast tribes and Visigothic ships. You never saw the letters, for I destroyed them.

“Not until safety really beckoned to you, not until her hand was really stretched out towards you, did I at length throw off the mask and openly strangle your last hope. Now in the Hippodrome at Byzantium I shall see you kiss Justinian’s feet—that is the culmination of my mother’s curse, my own oath, and my people’s revenge.”

He ceased; his countenance glowed with excitement, his eyes shot fiery glances of triumphant hate down at the prisoner.

Gelimer bent down and kissed the priest’s shoe, as it rested in the stirrup. “You, then, were the rod with which God chastened and still chastens me. I thank God and you for every deserved blow, just as I thanked God and you when I took you for my guardian spirit. And if, in acting as you have done, you have sinned against me and my people—that is not for me to say—then may God pardon you, as I myself fully do!”

XLVII.

TO CETHEGUS FROM PROCOPIUS.

THE captive king traversed the entire way back to Carthage on foot, positively declining either horse or camel. He journeyed on in silence, except that from time to time he prayed aloud in Latin ; but never in the Vandal tongue.

Fara offered him suitable clothing instead of the torn and tattered purple mantle which he wore. The prisoner thanked him and asked for a penitential belt with sharp pricks upon the inner side, such as the hermits of the desert are accustomed to use. We did not have with us such a senseless article, and besides Fara strongly disapproved of the request. So the "tyrant" had to fashion one for himself out of an old bridle which he found, and from the sharp thorns of the desert acacia.

He broke down right before the gate of his royal city, and fell upon his face in the sand of the road. Verus halted behind him, hesitated for a moment, and then raised his foot. I believe he would have set it upon the king's neck, had not Fara, who seemed to entertain the same suspicion, jerked the priest away with no gentle hand, and with some words of sympathy raised the fallen man,

Immediately within the Numidian gate, upon a spacious open place in the suburb Atlas, Belisarius had drawn up the greater part of his troops, filling three sides of the square; the fourth, that towards the gate, remained unoccupied.

Just opposite the gate, on a raised seat, our general sat enthroned, in the full splendor of his armor. Above his head rose the imperial standard; at his feet lay the scarlet flags and banners of the Vandals, many dozens of which we had captured. Only their great royal banner, which we have never been able to find, was wanting.

Around Belisarius stood the leaders of his victorious troops and many bishops and priests; also many senators and distinguished citizens of Carthage and other towns, who within the last few months have returned from banishment or flight,—among them the rejoicing Pudentius of Tripolis and his son.

To the left of Belisarius lay, spread out at his feet on purple cloths, the royal hoard of the Vandals, heaped up in artistically designed disorder: many chairs of solid gold; the chariot of the Vandal queens; an inestimable quantity of jewelry of every sort; the entire silver table-service of the king, and all the other appointments of the palace; weapons innumerable, including those

from the armories of Geiseric; also old Roman battle-standards, now at last set free from a captivity of many decades. There were arms enough with which, in the hands of valiant men, to conquer the world; there were Roman helmets with proudly waving crests, German boar and buffalo casques, Moorish shields covered with panther-skins, Moorish head-bands with nodding ostrich-feathers, doublets made from the hide of the crocodile—but it is scarcely possible to describe the variety and magnificence of the spoil.

To the right of Belisarius stood the most distinguished of the captives, their hands bound behind their backs. Besides the men there were many of the Vandal women, handsome in features and voluptuous in form. The whole picture was enclosed, as if in a metallic frame, by the squadrons of our cavalry and the thick masses of our infantry. What with the neighing of the horses, the waving of the crests, the clang and the glitter of the arms, it was a glorious spectacle, that thrilled the heart of every man who did not gaze upon it as one of the conquered.

Behind our soldiers the populace of Carthage pressed eagerly forward, reminded, however, by many a blow from the shaft of a spear that they had no part, except that of spectators, in this

celebration of their deliverance and that of Africa. This whole performance was, of course, only the prologue to the triumph in the Hippodrome at Byzantium which the emperor has already promised to Belisarius.

Meantime our little procession halted within the arched gateway, waiting for the appointed signal.

At a blast of the trumpets Fara and I, accompanied by some subordinate officers and thirty-Herulians, rode forward into the square and halted before the seat of Belisarius. He arose, commanded us to dismount, embraced and kissed Fara, and hung around his neck a great plate of gold as a prize of victory for the capture of a crowned king. As for me, he pressed my hand and bade me be his companion in all his future campaigns. That is for me the greatest possible reward, for I love this man with the courage of a lion and the heart of a child.

At his direction we stationed ourselves to the right and the left of his throne.

Then came two trumpet-peals, and Verus advanced through the gate into the square. He was attired in the rich ceremonial vestments of the Catholic priesthood. I noticed also that his narrow Arian tonsure had been changed into

the broader Catholic style. He came forward proudly, with head borne haughtily erect and with a look on his face that seemed to say, "Without me you would not be here, vain-glorious soldiers!" That, however, is not entirely true; we should undoubtedly have conquered without him, although it would have been harder and more tedious. And just so far as his claims have any justification, to that very extent they vex my friend Belisarius.

Our general knit his brow and cast upon the approaching priest a look of contempt, which caused the latter to lower his eyes, as, with a haughty mien, he bowed in salutation.

"I have a letter of the emperor to read to you, priest," spoke Belisarius. And taking from an attendant a purple roll of papyrus, he kissed it and read:

"Imperator Cæsar Flavius Justinianus Augustus, the pious, fortunate, and illustrious ruler and general, conqueror of the Allemanni, Franks, Germans, Antians, Alani, Persians, and now also of the Vandals, the Moors, and of Africa, to Verus the Archdeacon:

"You have preferred to carry on with my saintly consort, the empress, rather than with myself, a secret correspondence in regard to the over-

throw of the tyrant by our arms and with the aid of God. She promised, in case we should conquer, to request from me the reward which you desire. Theodora does not ask in vain from Justinian. Since you have established the fact that your acceptance of the heretic belief was mere pretence, that in your heart you remained a steadfast adherent of the true faith, and were recognized as such by your Catholic confessor, who was empowered to grant you a dispensation for the outward appearance of this sin, your standing as an orthodox priest cannot be questioned. Therefore, I command Belisarius by virtue of this letter to proclaim you forthwith the Catholic Bishop of Carthage—hear, all ye Carthaginians and Romans, I proclaim, in the name of the emperor, that Verus is the Catholic Bishop of Carthage—to set upon your head the bishop's mitre and to place in your hand the bishop's staff.' Kneel down, Bishop."

Verus hesitated. It seemed as if he would much rather receive the gold-embroidered mitre standing; but Belisarius held it down so low, so close to his own knees, that no other course remained to the priest except to submit to necessity if he wished his head to be adorned with the coveted honor.

As soon, however, as he had received it, he

sprang to his feet. Then Belisarius placed the richly gilded shepherd's staff in his hand.

With swelling heart and head erect the bishop started to pass to the right of the throne. But Belisarius said: "Stay, most holy man! I have not yet finished the emperor's letter." And he read on:

"Thus you obtain the stipulated reward. But Theodora, as you have already learned, does not ask in vain from Justinian. Therefore I fulfil also her second request.

"In her opinion a man so bold and crafty would be altogether too dangerous as bishop of Carthage. You might serve your new master as you did the old. Therefore she requests me that Belisarius, by virtue of this command, shall have you seized'—here, at a motion from Belisarius, Fara, evidently much rejoiced, laid his mailed hand upon the shoulder of the priest, who had turned deathly pale—'for you are banished for life to Martyropolis, on the Tigris, on the Persian frontier, as far as possible from Carthage. In your place, as your vicarius, the confessor of the empress, whom she wishes removed from Byzantium, will perform the duties of the bishop, with the approval of the Holy Father at Rome. At Martyropolis there are mines for criminals. You will

care for the souls of these exiles six hours each day. And in order that you may better understand their spiritual condition, for six other hours you will share their labor.' Away with him!"

Verus attempted to reply, but once more the trumpets pealed, and before the third blast died away the priest had been led off by six Thracians, and had disappeared down the steet which ran towards the harbor.

"Now summon Gelimer, the king of the Vandals," Belisarius called out in a loud voice.

Gelimer came forward from the gate upon the square, his hands fettered with a golden chain. One of the many dentated golden crowns found in the royal hoard had been pressed upon his long, disordered hair, and over his old, torn purple mantle and penitential belt a new and magnificent robe of the same regal material had been thrown. He stood passive, listless, silent, while being thus arrayed; only against the crown he at first made a gesture of protest, but a moment after submitted with the low murmur, "Well, then, my crown of thorns!"

Just as listless and silent, like a moving corpse, he now advanced across the open place, a distance of perhaps three hundred feet, and approached Belisarius.

At the mention of his name a loud whisper, broken by occasional exclamations, had passed along the ranks, but now when they saw him a silence fell upon all the thousands present; mockery, triumph, curiosity, revenge, sympathy, all failed to find expression, all were hushed before the majesty of his appearance, the majesty of unutterable sorrow.

No other prisoner, not even a guard, accompanied the captive king; he crossed the square entirely alone. His eyes, shaded by their long lashes and deeply sunken in their sockets, were fixed upon the ground; deeply sunken, too, were his pale cheeks; the gaunt fingers of his right hand were clasped about a small wooden cross. Blood trickled from his girdle and fell slowly in drops upon the white sand as he moved along.

Not a word was spoken. A death-like stillness pervaded the whole broad space; the people seemed almost to hold their breath until the unfortunate monarch stood before Belisarius.

Shocked at the sight and deeply moved, even the conqueror was at a loss for words. Impulsively he held out his hand to the man standing before him. Gelimer raised his great, mournful eyes, beheld Belisarius in all the splendor of gold and arms, glanced hastily around the three

sides of the square, saw the brilliant display of martial pomp, saw the standard of the victor waving above his head, the banners of the Vandals and their royal hoard spread out at his feet, and, with a wild, convulsive movement, dropping his cross, he clasped his hands, fettered as they were by the golden chain, high above his head, while a shrill and horrible laugh burst from him. Then with the cry, "Vanity! vanity! all is vanity!" he threw himself upon his face down in the sand, right at the feet of Belisarius.

"Is this sickness?" asked our general in a low voice.

"Oh no," I replied in the same tone. "It is despair—or, possibly, excessive piety. He deems life not worth the living, and all that is human, all that is earthly, even kindred and people, nothing but vanity, emptiness, sin. Is that, perhaps, to be the ultimate conclusion reached by our Christian faith?"

"No; that is insanity!" exclaimed Belisarius the hero. "Forward, my brave soldiers! Let the trumpet once more sound—the Roman trumpet, whose blast rings through the world. To the harbor! On board! And to our triumph in Byzantium!"

THE END.





